COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Remote location using Microsoft® Teams
Wednesday, December 15, 2021
9:00 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILWOMAN MARIA D. QUINONES-SANCHEZ, CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN HELEN GYM, VICE-CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN KENDRA BROOKS
COUNCILWOMAN JAMIE GAUTHIER
COUNCILMAN DAVID OH
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA
COUNCILMAN ISAIAH THOMAS

ALSO PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN DEREK S. GREEN

RESOLUTION: 210978

 1   - - -

 2   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

 3   Good morning. This is the Committee on

 4   Education hosting today's public hearing

 5   on Resolution No. 210978.

 6   Before we begin today's public

 7   hearing, I'll have to make the following

 8   announcement: Due to the continued

 9   threat of public health from COVID-19

10   and the Delta variant, City Council

11   Committees are currently meeting

12   remotely. We're using Microsoft Teams

13   to make these remote hearings possible.

14   Instructions for how the public

15   may view and offer public testimony at

16   public hearings of Council Committees

17   are included in the public hearing

18   notices that are published in the Daily

19   News, Inquirer and Legal Intelligencer

20   prior to all hearings and can also be

21   found on the PHLCouncil.com website. I

22   now note that the hour has come.

23   Will the Clerk please call the

24   roll for attendance. Members that are

25   in attendance, please indicate that you

 1   are present when your name is called.

 2   Also, please say a few brief words when

 3   responding so that your image can be

 4   displayed on screen when you speak.

 5   Can the Clerk please call the

 6   roll.

 7   THE CLERK: Councilmember Oh.

 8   COUNCILMAN OH: Present. Good

 9   morning, Chairwoman. Good morning,

10   colleagues. I am present.

11   THE CLERK: Councilmember

12   Brooks.

13   COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Good

14   morning. I am present.

15   THE CLERK: Councilmember Gym.

16   COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Good

17   morning. I'm present.

18   THE CLERK: Councilmember

19   Squilla.

20   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Good

21   morning, Madam Chair and colleagues.

22   Present.

23   THE CLERK: Councilmember

24   Gauthier.

25   COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Good

1   morning, Madam Chair, colleagues and to

2   all of the panelists. Present.

3   THE CLERK: Councilmember

4   Thomas.

5   (No response.)

6   THE CLERK: And, Chairwoman

7   Sanchez.

8   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

9   Good morning. I am present. Thank you.

10 A quorum of the Committee is present and

11 this hearing will now be called to

12 order. This is the public hearing of

13 the Committee on Education regarding

14 Resolution 210978.

15   Will the Clerk please read the

16 title of the resolution.

17   THE CLERK: Resolution No.

18 210978, calling for public hearings in

19 Council's Committee on Education to

20 examine the School District's newly

21 proposed admission process for

22 criteria-based middle and high school

23 schools.

24   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

25 Before we begin to hear testimony from

 1 the witnesses we have for today,

 2 everyone who has been invited to the

 3 meeting to testify should be aware that

 4 this is a public hearing that is being

 5 recorded. Because the hearing is

 6 public, participants and viewers have no

 7 reasonable expectation of privacy. By

 8 continuing to be in the meeting, you are

 9 consenting to being recorded.

10   Additionally, prior to

11 recognizing Members for questions or

12 comments they have for witnesses, I will

13 note for the record at this time that we

14 will use the chat feature available on

15 Microsoft Teams to allow Members to

16 signify that they wish to be recognized.

17 In order to comply with the Sunshine

18 Act, the chat feature must only be used

19 for this purpose.

20   Will the Clerk please call the

21 first panel to testify this morning on

22 Resolution 210978.

23   THE CLERK: The first panel is

24 Donna Bullock, Dr. Joshua Wilson, Steven

25 Kleinman, Dr. Keely McCarthy and

 1   Kimberly Caputo.

 2   COUNCILMAN OH: Yes. And,

 3   Chair, I do have an opening statement --

 4   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

 5   My apologies, Councilmember Oh. The

 6   Chair recognizes Councilman Oh for an

 7   opening statement before the panel gets

 8   started.

 9   COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very

10   much, Chair.

11   I received a phone call from

12   parents who live in Southwest

13   Philadelphia. I don't know them. They

14   tried to reach me through a friend. I

15   live in Southwest Philadelphia in Cobbs

16   Creek Kingsessing, and I have lived

17   there my whole life. I attended public

18   school at Longstreth and then Turner

19   Middle School. It is described as a

20   high crime, poor African American

21   neighborhood.

22   The parents who contacted me,

23   they told me that their son was

24   fortunate to receive financial aid, a

25   grant, a scholarship, to Catholic School

1   where he excelled. His GPA was close to

2   4.0. He did extremely well in the

3   standardized tests, in the 98th

4   percentile. They struggled in the

5   community to keep him off the streets,

6   to keep him safe where there's a lot of

7   violence and danger. They were proud of

8   his work ethic and his commitment to

9   helping others, great recommendations,

10   and they believed that would be

11   explained in his essay.

12   They were alarmed, and what

13   they were telling me I was unclear of

14   because I didn't have any details. I

15   was even unsure of what was going on.

16   What they told me is that they learned

17   that there's a new process to get into

18   one of the criteria-based schools, in

19   this case it was Central High School,

20   that Central High School and our magnet

21   schools under a new process just

22   announced by the School District and

23   already implemented, with great

24   confusion, was that their son's

25   standardized tests will not be taken

 1   into account, his recommendation letters

 2   will not be taken into account, and his

 3   essay would be graded by a computer

 4   program, which they felt very insecure

 5   about.

 6   I have since learned that the

 7   computer program obviously cannot judge

 8   content, but is specifically not to be

 9   used for grading. It's a teaching aid

10   and, therefore, that left them with a

11   GPA. But they understood to some extent

12   and were asking me, that GPA is not the

13   only criteria in the sense that perhaps

14   their son, for example, got a 3.8 GPA,

15   someone might have a 3.2, but then it's

16   in a lottery. And that was very

17   disturbing to them.

18   But they also said they

19   understood that some zip codes would

20   receive weight. What weight, how much

21   weight, what zip codes? I don't know

22   what the zip codes are as of today. But

23   at the time I looked at it, there were

24   no zip codes in West Philadelphia, no

25   zip codes in Southwest Philadelphia, no

 1 zip codes in South Philadelphia, no zip

 2 codes in most parts of Philadelphia that

 3 represent underserved communities. So

 4 it was unclear to me at that time what

 5 the basis of all of this was.

 6   What it turns out to be is it's

 7 an effort to reach equity, and I don't

 8 see that at all, but that can be

 9 debated. However, the problem appears

10 to me to be the fact that this was

11 announced the day before a seven-week

12 window open for applications to these

13 criteria-based admissions schools. And

14 people were reeling from the fact that

15 an entirely new process had been put in

16 without their knowledge, without their

17 opportunity to discuss or to have

18 experts weigh in on it and that it was

19 already implemented.

20   We have witnesses today and we

21 have parents today. And the fundamental

22 question, is this system better than

23 what had existed before. And certainly,

24 the issues around it include the fact

25 that Philadelphia by some accounts is

1 ranked 597 out of 707 school districts

2 in the state of Pennsylvania, putting us

3 at the bottom 15, where we have to

4 fight, parents and students, to get a

5 good education whereas other students

6 simply by where they live, they just go

7 to school and it's a great school.

8   It is the fact that there isn't

9 equal opportunity or equity in any of

10 this, but the issue is access. In other

11 words, not improving neighborhood

12 schools, not providing academic programs

13 and alternatives and opportunities, but

14 simply going in and changing the

15 admissions process for those schools

16 that parents feel provide a good

17 education in a city that does not

18 provide good education.

19   So by doing this system, is it

20 equity? Equality is fairness. $1,000,

21 I get 500, you get 500. Equity is an

22 adjustment for disadvantages. Perhaps I

23 have a disadvantage, so instead of 500,

24 I get 600, you get 400. Equity of

25 outcome. This process does neither. It

1   ends up taking away from people the

2   opportunity to go to a school as good as

3   St. Joe's Prep, Germantown Friends,

4   Baldwin or Friends Select, which the

5   tuition is between $18,000 and $42,000 a

6   year. But anyone in Philadelphia

7   through self-determination, effort,

8   though not perfect, can go to a

9   criteria-based school or what we call a

10 magnet school, and is this a better

11 system. And it certainly is not clear

12 that it is.

13   And so, this provides an

14 opportunity for parents and community

15 and experts to now provide to the School

16 District, to the City of Philadelphia

17 and to our Councilmembers what they

18 would have liked to have told the School

19 District, and some people will say that

20 they like the system and some people

21 will say that they do not.

22   But I thank you, Chair, for

23 holding this hearing and I appreciate my

24 colleagues for taking the time. Thank

25 you.

 1   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

 2   Thank you, Councilmember Oh.

 3   The Chair recognizes

 4   Councilwoman Helen Gym for opening

 5   remarks.

 6   COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank you so

 7   much, Madam Chair. And I apologize to

 8   the public for the condition of my

 9   voice. I'm trying get it back. But I

10   wanted to make some brief opening

11   remarks in case I'm not fully able to

12   participate in the Q&A later.

13   First of all, I want to thank

14   all the community members, parents,

15   educators who are on this hearing or are

16   watching this hearing because today

17   needs to be a conversation about equity.

18   And that is an important conversation

19   that we need to have. It has been a

20   critical conversation since the advent

21   of the creation of special selection

22   schools, criteria-based admission

23   schools in the School District of

24   Philadelphia.

25   And it is particularly

 1   important because in recent years we

 2   have seen an alarming drop in the number

 3   of African American student enrollment

 4   at many of our criteria-based admission

 5   schools. That is an issue for the

 6   entire City to be concerned about. That

 7   is a particular issue that I'm certainly

 8   concerned about and have raised directly

 9   with the Superintendent in particular

10   around a school that two of my children

11   attended, Masterman. And in particular,

12   when we see plummeting student

13   enrollment, there needs to be an

14   analysis. There needs to be addressing

15   of conditions. There needs to be

16   dialogue and there needs to be change.

17   I think the question isn't

18   whether we go with a new system or go

19   with the old system. Things need to

20   change in order for equity to be

21   achieved here in the School District of

22   Philadelphia. But I do have serious

23   issues about this process. I think some

24   of them my colleague Councilmember

25   David Oh addressed.

 1   There's no question that in

 2   terms of process, announcing a brand new

 3   high school selections process on the

 4   day that high school selection

 5   effectively with almost no information

 6   going to parents is irresponsible. It

 7   created chaos and uncertainty, fear and

 8   suspicion. That is the wrong approach

 9   towards any school system, towards its

10   students, towards its parents and

11   towards its educators and towards our

12   City.

13   I think that there was no

14   question that there was no significant

15   public input. I know we will hear from

16   the District that there might have been

17   some amounts of parent surveys that

18   might have gone out. That is not a

19   substitution for input. There was no

20   significant input into this decision

21   that was made. And a generation of

22   kids, certainly a whole class of them,

23   are deeply impacted by that and that

24   also is unacceptable.

25   And then finally, I want to

 1   take issue with the idea of what equity

 2   is and what it isn't. Equity is a

 3   purposeful change in practice, policy,

 4   resources and investments. It requires

 5   human intervention because otherwise

 6   things will go the way polling goes or

 7   the way SAT scores go. We know that

 8   they reflect privilege. And thus,

 9   equity requires intervention. That is

10   why I do primarily take issue with the

11   School District's announcement that this

12   process intends to "remove all human

13   judgment from the admissions process of

14   select schools." That is not equity.

15   It is not equity in any definition.

16   It is randomness. Randomness

17   is not synonymous with equity.

18   Randomness can be chaos. Randomness can

19   also be inequity and randomness does not

20   build for confidence, trust and

21   engagement in a better more equitable

22   school system that serves all students

23   and not the most privileged.

24   We also know that some of the

25   computer algorithms that are being

1   proposed for things like a writing essay

2   makes no sense in the criminal justice

3   field and they do not make sense in the

4   evolution of young people. Many young

5   people -- one thing that we know about

6   computer algorithms is that they can

7   measure a preinserted formula of

8   effectiveness, but they cannot measure

9   heart. They cannot measure potential.

10   They cannot measure the power of a young

11   person's voice to speak to experience.

12   It is shocking to me that a

13   computer would read and review essays

14   for applications to a school. And so,

15   again I want to emphasize algorithms,

16   removing human judgment are no way a

17   form of equity. They're not assuring

18   change and I do not think that they are

19   a better change.

20   And then finally, the last

21   thing I want to say is that the

22   longstanding issues around equity in the

23   School District, not only plummeting

24   enrollment of African American students

25   at criteria-based schools, but the

 1 plummeting number of African American

 2 teachers in the School District of

 3 Philadelphia, the plummeting number of

 4 African American leadership in the City

 5 is something that should be school

 6 leadership in the City, is something

 7 that needs to be a top priority in this

 8 School District. One without the other

 9 and not having a fuller sense of our

10 commitment to all schools, particularly

11 our elementary schools, resources that

12 are invested in them makes this move

13 even more difficult to understand.

14   And so, I hope this

15 conversation today is going to be a

16 complicated one. I know our School

17 Board has been dedicated to its goals

18 and guardrails, but I also urge the

19 School Board to understand that equity

20 isn't played out in algorithms and

21 things that are created down at 440.

22 They're executed in classrooms all

23 across the City of Philadelphia in the

24 welcomeness that young people as soon as

25 they step foot into a school in terms of

1   the opportunities that they are granted

2   when mistakes are made, in terms of

3   opportunities for scholarship, external

4   opportunities for leadership that are

5   provided in schools and outside of them.

6   I expect that this will be an ongoing

7   conversation far beyond this hearing.

8   I want to thank the Chair and

9   the sponsor for taking the time to hold

10   it, but I do believe that we are going

11   to have a much more serious dedicated

12   conversation to equity that goes far

13   beyond school selection and admission,

14   and that we should challenge any equity

15   definition that calls for the removal of

16   human judgment and relies on computer

17   algorithms. Those are not again equity.

18   We need a fuller vision of it. I look

19   forward to that conversation.

20   Thank you, Madam Chair.

21   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

22   Thank you, Councilmember Gym.

23   The Chair recognizes

24   Councilmember Gauthier for some opening

25   remarks.

 1   COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Thank

 2   you, Madam Chair.

 3   Good morning to my fellow

 4   Education Committee members and the City

 5   of Philadelphia. We're here today

 6   because there is a glaring equity

 7   problem in many of our criteria-based

 8   high schools. Just a few months ago

 9   students from some of these schools

10   voiced their concerns over the dwindling

11   enrollment of Black and Hispanic

12   students, and they are understandably

13   disturbed by how the demographics as the

14   City top schools do not even come close

15   to reflecting the demographics of

16   Philadelphia as a whole.

17   While I commend the School

18   District for putting a plan in place

19   specifically to address the disparities

20   in the selection process, the

21   implementation of this plan has left me

22   with many questions, the most pressing

23   of which is about the prioritization of

24   students by zip code and the timeline

25   for implementation.

 1   By using large areas to

 2   determine representation in the City's

 3   criteria-based schools, thousands of

 4   children from underrepresented

 5   neighborhoods are at risk of being

 6   overlooked because they share a zip code

 7   with students from more resourced areas.

 8   As one example from my District, which

 9   is not included in any of the zip codes

10   that are given preference, I would want

11   to be sure that kids from Cobbs Creek

12   are represented in the top schools the

13   way that students from Cedar Park are

14   because these are very different

15   neighborhoods even though they share a

16   zip code and are only a few minutes

17   apart.

18   If a prioritization model like

19   this one is truly to be effective, we

20   need to look at smaller sections of the

21   City so that students are grouped in a

22   way that allows the student bodies of

23   our criteria-based schools to be more

24   reflective of our City's diversity. The

25   timing of the implementation of this new

 1   process also gave me pause. The school

 2   selection feedback survey was open until

 3   June 11th, and results and solutions

 4   were released the first week of October,

 5   the same week that the high school

 6   selection process for the next year

 7   began.

 8   And it concerns me that parents

 9   and students were notified of the

10   changes to the application process the

11   same week that students were expected to

12   begin choosing the high schools that

13   they wanted to attend. In a system

14   that's already inequitable, it would be

15   almost impossible for even

16   well-resourced students to adjust to

17   these kind of massive changes, let alone

18   our most vulnerable students.

19   The selection process does need

20   an overhaul, but we need to evaluate

21   whether the system that has been put in

22   place for the upcoming school year will

23   actually create the equity that we are

24   striving for in our City schools.

25   So I look forward to the

1 conversation today, and I appreciate the

2 sponsor of this resolution and the Chair

3 of this Committee for hosting it.

4   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

5 Thank you so very much. I know that at

6 last week's School Board meeting there

7 was a lot of discussion around this

8 issue. I look forward to this morning's

9 conversation. And like my colleagues,

10 I'm very concerned because we're finally

11 recognizing the issue of equity, racial

12 equity and then we roll out something

13 that is so bumpy and so chaotic. And

14 this is not the kind of conversation we

15 should be having.

16   We should be having a

17 conversation about providing more

18 opportunity, not less opportunity. And

19 so, I hope that through this

20 conversation and the conversation that

21 has been happening by the School Board,

22 that the School District will listen to

23 many of the folks who are going to

24 testify today and really consider what

25 it's going to implement this year and

1 how we can better improve this process.

2 So I also want to thank the resolution

3 sponsor for this discussion.

4   So with that, we will start

5 with our first panel. I'm going to

6 reiterate that the Honorable Donna

7 Bullock first, Dr. Joshua Wilson, Steven

8 Kleinman, Dr. Keely McCarthy, Jaya

9 Ramji-Nogales, and Kimberly Caputo. So,

10 Representative Bullock.

11   As a parent also of a graduate

12 of Masterman and Central, I can tell you

13 that this is an issue that I have

14 personally experienced myself, this

15 process. So thank you very much. Good

16 morning. Please proceed with your

17 testimony.

18   STATE REPRESENTATIVE BULLOCK:

19 Good morning. Thank you, Councilwoman,

20 Chairwoman Maria Quinones-Sanchez.

21 First, let me thank my former boss in

22 his absence, Council President Darrell

23 Clarke, as I mentioned the Chairwoman,

24 Councilmember David Oh and the members

25 of the Education Committee for inviting

 1   me to speak today.

 2   For the record, my name is

 3   Donna Bullock and I serve as the

 4   Representative of the 195th Legislative

 5   District, Chair of the Pennsylvania

 6   Legislative Black Caucus and most

 7   important title, a parent in the

 8   Philadelphia School District.

 9   In early October, I had to

10   share with my son, a current 8th grader

11   at Carver, that the school selection

12   process had changed. His immediate

13   response, I can't stay at my school.

14   You see, my son had enrolled in Carver

15   Middle School after participating in a

16   tour meeting its principal, learning

17   about its STEM programs, talking to

18   students and reading on its website that

19   the middle school was a path to entering

20   the Carver School community early.

21   Since the inception of its

22   middle school program, substantially all

23   of its middle school students continued

24   on through the high school, comprising

25   of about 25 percent of the high school

 1 class while welcoming in new students

 2 from all across the City to fill the

 3 other 75 percent of the seats. The

 4 school had a reputation for its small

 5 diverse community. Its 900-plus 7th

 6 through 12th grade students are more

 7 than 60 percent Black, 13 percent Asian,

 8 9 percent Latino and 8 percent White.

 9 More than two-thirds of the students

10 come from economically disadvantaged

11 households and many of them will be the

12 first in their families to attend

13 college.

14   And when the school was

15 recognized as the Blue Ribbon school in

16 2019, our Board of Education President

17 Joyce Wilkerson praised the school for

18 its diversity saying, and I quote, "I

19 want to salute Carver's commitment to

20 diversity and equity. It does it in a

21 way no one else does. It's unmatched in

22 the City." But the School District's

23 recent announcement puts all of that

24 into question.

25   I share that because as I

 1 prepared my remarks for today, it

 2 required me to understand the very

 3 privileged and competing

 4 responsibilities that I bring to this

 5 conversation. Every parent, including

 6 lawmakers like myself, is going to do

 7 what is best for their child. And I

 8 acknowledge that.

 9   I am also a legislator who has

10 advocated for equitable solutions to

11 address the disparities created and

12 perpetuated by years of historically

13 racist and inequitable systems,

14 institutions and investments. So I do

15 not take this conversation lightly. As

16 we spent a year talking about equity as

17 legislators, we now face the conundrum

18 of what does equity really look like

19 beyond words and eloquent statements.

20   What does equity look like in

21 our policies and actions, how do we fund

22 equity in our budget. And even more

23 challenging, how do we achieve equity

24 with limited resources. Equity is about

25 giving people what they need to have the

 1   same access to the same opportunities

 2   and benefits. But when it comes to

 3   limited resources or in this case a

 4   limited number of seats in top

 5   performing schools in an otherwise

 6   underperforming School District that is

 7   also underfunded by state funds, how do

 8   we equitably divide the pie when we

 9   simply don't have enough pie.

10   In this case, we create winners

11   and losers. And no matter how we slice

12   that pie, we will just have another set

13   of winners and losers. And the more I

14   talk to parents at Carver, at SLA

15   Beeber, at Masterman, at schools all

16   across the City, I realize that more is

17   at stake than the 8th grade class at

18   Carver. We must do this right.

19   We have a chance as

20   legislators, as policymakers, as

21   lawmakers, as leaders and as parents to

22   be critical of any and all policies even

23   those that claim to address equity and

24   to ensure that they actually achieve the

25   goals that they set forth and not set us

 1   back. We have an obligation to do so

 2   for our children and for our

 3   constituents.

 4   So before I move on, I want to

 5   applaud the City Council for holding

 6   this hearing and asking the tough

 7   questions. As explained by the

 8   Councilmembers in their opening remarks,

 9   the School District announced this

10   online application at the same time that

11   they announced the significant changes

12   to the process. It's not the first time

13   that they've attempted to do this and

14   nor are they the only school district to

15   try.

16   New York City also implemented

17   a lottery last year among other things

18   with modest results. A decade ago

19   Chicago public schools used the

20   race-based admissions program. It now

21   chooses 30 percent of its students from

22   a city-wide poll and the remaining 70

23   percent from a much complicated process

24   that draws evenly from the top students

25   from various socioeconomic tiers in

 1 census tracts throughout the City rather

 2 than zip codes. This is not easy.

 3   As we heard Philadelphia's

 4 changes included removing barriers to

 5 eligibility such as making Algebra

 6 available to every single middle school

 7 student and removing the foreign

 8 language requirements, changes that I

 9 believe are appropriate and equitable

10 without question. But the more

11 aggressive and controversial changes

12 that included a lottery for eligible

13 students, that included an online

14 writing assessment created by an

15 algorithm, that included zip code

16 preferences only representing one

17 section of the City, all of these threw

18 the policy and the process into

19 question.

20   The merits of these policies

21 will be discussed by other panelists so

22 I will focus on process, much like the

23 opening remarks from the Councilmembers.

24 The School District's development and

25 implementation of the new admissions

 1 process is fraught with

 2 miscommunication, lack of transparency,

 3 conflicting information and mishaps,

 4 such as the total system failure during

 5 the administration of the online writing

 6 assessment at one school. These things

 7 continue to call on and to question the

 8 effectiveness of the policy and more

 9 specifically, the ability of the School

10 District to execute it.

11   The Board of Education adopted

12 a broad policy about equity during last

13 spring. This was all part of its goals

14 and guardrails framework. A policy that

15 at such a high level all of us will

16 agree with, we all acknowledge how we

17 must address equity and access in these

18 criteria-based schools. But the policy

19 lacked any details about how we will

20 actually achieve equity.

21   Those details were left to

22 School District personnel and were

23 developed without much public input

24 other than an online survey, and even

25 that survey failed to build any

 1   consensus around some of the most

 2   polarizing changes in the new process.

 3   And to my knowledge, there wasn't any

 4   public comment or opportunity to provide

 5   feedback or the proposed changes before

 6   the announcement.

 7   And even if these steps were

 8   taken to engage School District

 9   families, they clearly were not

10   sufficient as many families, teachers,

11   students and faculty were shell-shocked

12   by the announcement of the changes this

13   fall. This alone should have given the

14   School District pause to ask whether

15   they effectively rolled out this

16   process.

17   Furthermore, the announcement

18   had very little details about the online

19   writing assessment, the zip code

20   processes or any clarity about how it

21   applied to middle schools like Carver

22   that had traditionally served as a

23   pipeline to their high schools. School

24   District personnel admitted that they

25   were still developing a process as the

 1   process was being implemented.

 2   Students, parents and teachers

 3   and guidance counselors waited as

 4   details trickled out, and yet many

 5   questions remained leading up to

 6   November 21st application deadline,

 7   during the administration of the online

 8   writing assessments, these last few

 9   weeks and even today.

10   Does the use of technology

11   through both the lottery and online

12   writing assessment truly eliminate bias

13   and achieve equity? According to

14   Virginia Eubanks in her book Automating

15   Inequality, technology systems don't

16   remove the bias. They simply move it.

17   Move it to a different set of winners

18   and losers. Technology is not a

19   substitute for justice. And the use of

20   algorithms in the delivery of public

21   services often fail the most vulnerable.

22   So how are we safeguarding against those

23   concerns.

24   What was the process for

25   selecting the companies that developed

1   this technology, the technology to

2   administer the lottery and the writing

3   assessment? How exactly would zip code

4   preferences be applied? Was this change

5   really just about a few schools or a few

6   administrators and why couldn't we

7   address those behaviors in those

8   specific situations? Could the lottery

9   possibly make a school like Carver less

10 diverse? And what, if any, appeals

11 process even exist? These are just a

12 few questions.

13   The School District's approach

14 to developing and announcing this new

15 admissions process, as mentioned by

16 earlier comments, did not build any

17 confidence in the School District. In

18 fact, it breaks trust and discontent.

19 It unnecessarily pits families against

20 each other and causes division.

21 Policies and actions to achieve equity

22 must be strategic, they must be

23 intentional and they must be inclusive.

24 They should reflect our values as a city

25 and they must have buy-in to work.

 1   It is not sufficient to say

 2   this is equity for equity's sake without

 3   explanation. If the Health Department

 4   were to decide to distribute vaccines by

 5   lottery, there will be public outcry and

 6   we would question how do we prioritize

 7   those most in need. If the City were to

 8   award City contracts by lottery to

 9   achieve equity, such a shift in policy

10   and practices would require months of

11   public engagement. And if we had

12   determined which laws to pass based on

13   an algorithm, I'm not sure how many of

14   us will get re-elected.

15   For the next several years, we

16   will be faced with more challenges when

17   it comes to how we equitably distribute

18   resources and services. The question is

19   are we willing to do the hard work to

20   create real equity and not just the

21   reallocation of the same pieces of the

22   small pie. The hard work would be

23   figuring out how do we create more pie,

24   more quality seats and classrooms across

25   the City, how do we replicate the

 1 success of a Carver or a Central or

 2 Masterman and other parts of our great

 3 beloved City, how do we invest in our

 4 neighborhood schools and how do we keep

 5 fighting at the state for the fair

 6 funding formula so that Philadelphia has

 7 the resources to provide more

 8 opportunity for all of our students.

 9   Since that October conversation

10 with my son, I have constantly checked

11 my own moral compass. Yes, I want my

12 son to go to the school he believes best

13 matches his interests and would best

14 prepare him for his next chapter. But I

15 also want that for his classmates, a

16 diverse group of students from all

17 across the City and from different and

18 social economic backgrounds.

19   I want that for the shining

20 star at Gideon Elementary in North

21 Philadelphia, for the student at

22 McMichael in West or at Childs

23 Elementary in South Philadelphia and I

24 want that for the student coming from

25 St. Malachy entering the School District

1   for the first time. We have a

2   responsibility to all of our students

3   and reshuffling the equity deck doesn't

4   get us there. Investing in equity does.

5   I look forward to hearing the

6   testimony from all of the other

7   panelists. And again, I want to thank

8   City Council for taking this opportunity

9   to allow the public to hear from the

10 School District and to ask the hard

11 questions to make sure we are getting

12 this opportunity to address equity

13 right. We must do it right. This is

14 the time. Thank you.

15   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

16 Thank you, Representative Bullock.

17 Thank you as a parent of a public school

18 student. Thank you so very much. It's

19 so important to have your voice in

20 Harrisburg, and we appreciate the

21 collaboration.

22   Dr. Joshua Wilson, can you

23 proceed with your testimony.

24   DR. WILSON: Thank you. Good

25 morning. Can everyone hear me?

1   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

2   (Nodded affirmatively).

3   DR. WILSON: Okay. Thank you.

4   Good morning. Thank you,

5   Councilmembers, for inviting me to offer

6   my testimony at today's City Council

7   Education hearing. My name is

8   Dr. Joshua Wilson and I'm an Associate

9   Professor of Education at the University

10   of Delaware. I'm an expert in the use

11   of automated scoring and automated

12   writing evaluation tools in K-12

13   education. I've published 17 articles

14   on this topic and my research has been

15   funded by the U.S. Department of

16   Education, Institute of Education

17   Sciences, the Spencer Foundation and the

18   Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

19   I wanted to share my concerns

20   about the writing sample that is being

21   used as part of the school selection

22   process. But first, I do want to

23   clarify that the District's decision in

24   absence of PSSA scores to evaluate

25   writing is laudable. Writing is one of

 1 the best predictors of academic success.

 2 In addition, it's also laudable that the

 3 District recognizes the challenges of

 4 efficiently and reliably scoring student

 5 writing. Scoring writing is time-

 6 consuming challenging work. It is

 7 virtually impossible to institute an

 8 efficient and reliable human scoring

 9 process. Without substantial rater

10 training, scoring writing can be filled

11 with error and bias.

12   Instead, rater error as it

13 known in the field is perhaps the

14 largest source of error in writing

15 evaluation. Thus, the decision by the

16 District to adopt a scoring method that

17 ensures consistency and objectivity,

18 increases efficiency and reduces biases

19 is also reasonable and laudable.

20 Automated essay scoring can be a natural

21 solution in that regard.

22   Automated essay scoring or AES,

23 sometimes called machine scoring, is the

24 use of computer algorithms to assign

25 scores to student writing that are

1 highly consistent with those a trained

2 rater would assign. Those scores are

3 returned immediately with no human

4 effort and those scores are 100 percent

5 consistent. The computer is not biased

6 by the student's name, gender, race,

7 attendance or behavior or anything else

8 that a rater may consciously or

9 unconsciously inform the way that they

10 score that student's writing sample.

11   AES just examines the features

12 of that essay, features such as

13 vocabulary, sentence structure,

14 cohesion, coherence and assigns a score

15 based on how that essay compares to

16 essays that scored previously. So

17 turning to AES could be seen as a

18 reasonable decision by the District.

19   Indeed there is precedent to

20 suggest that automated scoring can make

21 placement decisions. For example, the

22 WritePlacer test designed by the College

23 Board is a writing test score using AES

24 that is used in community and four-year

25 colleges to determine whether a student

 1   requires development or basic writing

 2   courses before taking credit-bearing

 3   courses.

 4   And finally, there is a new

 5   form of educational technology that

 6   incorporates AES and automated feedback

 7   to help support the teaching and

 8   learning of writing. This technology

 9   sometimes referred to as automated

10   writing evaluation combines automated

11   scoring and automated feedback to help

12   students learn the strengths and

13   weaknesses of their writing, helps

14   teachers promote greater amounts of

15   writing practice and more rapid practice

16   feedback cycles, and ultimately help

17   improve writing instruction, writing

18   outcomes for students. Indeed the MI

19   Write system used by the School District

20   of Philadelphia is one such program. A

21   program I have done a lot of research on

22   myself. In my research, I show that by

23   giving students feedback about the ways

24   they can improve their essays when

25   revising, MI Write provides benefits to

 1   teachers and students.

 2   So the first point I want to

 3   make is that AES itself, automated essay

 4   scoring, is not the bad guy. It's not

 5   that there are no valid uses of AES,

 6   there are. However it depends on how

 7   AES is used, which brings me to my

 8   concerns about the School District's

 9   writing sample as part of its school

10   selection process. As I will share,

11   these concerns how AES is being used

12   here, but also include the writing --

13   they're also broader and include the way

14   that the writing assessment is

15   independent of AES.

16   So my concerns: First, I do

17   not believe the use of the MI Write

18   system in this instance is appropriate.

19   MI Write is not intended to be used as

20   part of high stakes decision-making. MI

21   Write is intended to support

22   classroom-based writing instruction,

23   giving students feedback about ways they

24   can improve their essays when revising.

25   Further, it is not meant to be

1   used without a teacher or a human rater

2   looking at student writing. Yet this is

3   what is happening here. And here's an

4   example of why using MI Write for high

5   stakes decisions is inappropriate. Its

6   scoring system is deliberately designed

7   not to evaluate content. It only

8   evaluates the quality of the writing.

9   This is not because AES can never score

10 content. It can.

11   It's also not because

12 Measurement, Inc., the developers of MI

13 Write, do not know how to create those

14 kinds of algorithms or models. They

15 can. MI Write doesn't score for content

16 because doing so would mean that MI

17 Write would need to include a very

18 limited number of writing prompts and

19 that teachers would not be able to

20 create their own writing prompts or

21 embed their curriculums writing prompts.

22   If MI Write is intended to work

23 in different school districts, in

24 different schools and with different

25 curricula, it would be a substantial

1 limitation to only include a limited

2 number of prompts that students can

3 practice on. Instead the tool is

4 designed to score only for writing

5 quality, ignoring content so that it can

6 be maximally flexible across

7 instructional context. And this is okay

8 because it's intended to be used in

9 conjunction with the teacher who also

10 reads and provides feedback on the

11 student's writing.

12   If the system is scoring for

13 general aspects of writing quality, it

14 frees up the teacher to address the

15 content issues. And when I work with

16 teachers, I say that's what you've gone

17 to school to do. You really want to

18 help writers develop their voice,

19 develop their insight. So it frees you

20 up to do what you've gone to school to

21 do. You didn't go to school to be an

22 editor or else you'd been an editor.

23   If the system were designed to

24 be a placement test or support placement

25 decisions, it would be desirable and

 1 preferable to score for content and

 2 include only a limited number of prompts

 3 to ensure that students writing is

 4 scored more fully and appropriately in

 5 that context. And in fact, thinking

 6 about the WritePlacer example, that

 7 assessment uses a yes, but that AES

 8 system scores for content.

 9   Indeed when you remove the

10 teacher as reader from MI Write and use

11 an AES system that doesn't score for

12 context, it introduces the possibility

13 that students can compose off-topic

14 prompts or well-written nonsense. This

15 type of writing could conceivably

16 receive a higher score than the writing

17 of a student that is responding to the

18 prompt and has creative insight, but has

19 more errors than basic writing skills,

20 and this is a serious issue if there are

21 high stakes attached to performance,

22 stakes like school selection which is

23 the case in the current situation.

24   Next, I know of no research

25 that validates the cut scores selected

 1 by the District as predictive of future

 2 success in those respective schools.

 3 Absent appropriately researched and

 4 validated cut scores, decisions on who

 5 can and cannot enter the lottery may not

 6 be accurate and thus may cause harm.

 7 Why a 22? Why not 24 or 21? Why a 17

 8 and not 16 or 18?

 9   While there are percentiles

10 attached to the scores that MI Write

11 produces, it is unclear whether those

12 scores are nationally normed or

13 represent a population of students

14 writing in response to 90-minute writing

15 prompts, which is what the School

16 District has elected to use as its

17 writing sample.

18   I'm unaware of any published

19 research for Measurement, Inc. that

20 describes those aspects of the

21 percentile scores. Thus, I will not

22 treat the MI Write percentile scores as

23 equivalent to percentile scores

24 generated from a validated norm

25 reference test like the PSSA.

 1   Finally, it is well-known in

 2   the field of writing assessment that a

 3   single writing prompt is insufficient to

 4   make an accurate decision about a

 5   student's writing ability. Students

 6   vary in their performance relative to

 7   the genre of the prompt, whether they

 8   compose narrative information or opinion

 9   pieces and relative to the topic of the

10   prompt.

11   For example, writing about out

12   of space or bravery or the role of

13   automation in industry, for example.

14   These variations mean that a score from

15   a single writing assessment indicates

16   only so much about a student's writing

17   skills, and I've done research showing

18   that when using MI Write with elementary

19   students, you arrive at a much more

20   generalizable estimate of a student's

21   true writing ability if they complete

22   three 30-minute writing prompts, one

23   prompt in each genre and then taking the

24   average of those scores.

25   Thus, I wonder if the District

 1   would have better served allocating the

 2   90-minute assessment window to elicit

 3   three 30-minute writing samples in

 4   different genres versus a single writing

 5   sample. So in sum, I do think the

 6   District was wise to think about the

 7   role of writing assessment in making

 8   predictions about student success in

 9   academically-demanding schools.

10   I also think it was wise to

11   consider ways to make scoring that

12   writing assessment maximally reliable

13   and efficient reducing, removing any

14   human bias that may be limiting

15   diversity in these schools. Looking to

16   AES was also reasonable as it has a

17   number of benefits and it can address

18   those goals. However, MI Write was not

19   intended to be used in this way and

20   coupled with the lack of research on the

21   selected cut scores and issues

22   surrounding single item writing

23   assessments, good intentions

24   unfortunately arrived at a very

25   problematic writing assessment scenario

 1 that should be reconsidered given the

 2 stakes attached. Thank you very much

 3 for your time today.

 4   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

 5 Thank you. That was very insightful.

 6 Steven Kleinman. Please state your name

 7 for the record and proceed with your

 8 testimony.

 9   MR. KLEINMAN: Yes. Thank you.

10 Turning on my audio and video. One

11 second.

12   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

13 My apologies. Give me a minute. The

14 Chair recognizes Councilmember Green has

15 joined us.

16   Did you have an opening comment

17 or you had a comment, Councilmember?

18   COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,

19 Madam Chair.

20   I also want to thank

21 Councilmember Oh and all of the other

22 Councilmembers that sponsored this

23 resolution. Although I'm not a member

24 of the Education Committee, I'm

25 definitely concerned in reference to

 1 this new policy and direction. I will

 2 be listening and paying attention, but

 3 I support the efforts of both you, Madam

 4 Chair, as well as Councilmember Oh and

 5 the other members of this Committee in

 6 addressing this issue that I was really

 7 somewhat taken aback in reference to how

 8 quickly this proposal came about when

 9 many parents and members were not aware

10 of it. So thank you for this

11 opportunity and I will be listening as

12 ex officio, I guess, a member of this

13 Committee. So thank you.

14   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

15 Thank you, Councilmember Green.

16   I also want to recognize, he's

17 raised his hand, Councilmember Thomas.

18 Councilmember Thomas, did you have

19 something to add?

20   COUNCILMAN THOMAS: No, not

21 really. I just wanted to note for the

22 record that I'm present and also thank

23 you to the leadership on this issue. I

24 actually have a 4th grade son. So for

25 ethical purposes, I try to stay away

 1 from this conversation because whatever

 2 decisions are going to be made is going

 3 to have a direct impact on my son, but I

 4 do echo the sentiments of my colleagues

 5 as it relates to the concern around this

 6 issue.

 7   Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank

 8 you, Councilmember Oh. Appreciate your

 9 leadership.

10   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

11 Thank you, Councilmember Thomas.

12   Mr. Kleinman, my apologies.

13 You can get started.

14   MR. KLEINMAN: Great. Thank

15 you. And I'm just sharing my screen.

16 One second. And I just want to make

17 sure that everybody can see that on the

18 screen, School District of Philadelphia.

19 I'm sorry. Can everybody see that?

20   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

21 (Nodded affirmatively).

22   MR. KLEINMAN: So good morning.

23 And again, thank you for the chance to

24 testify. My name is Steve Kleinman.

25 I'm a parent of a student applying to

1 high school, but I'm here because for

2 over 30 years I led research initiatives

3 at a nonprofit here in Philly best known

4 for developing the licensing exam for

5 physicians in the U.S.

6   My job for many years was to

7 look for novel assessment approaches,

8 including cutting edge technologies like

9 automated scoring. I served there a

10 Senior Vice-president for Research and

11 Discovery and have published on a range

12 of assessment topics. Professor Wilson

13 shared with us a few reasons why the

14 writing sample is problematic, a design

15 for feedback, not high stakes use, cut

16 scores not validated, one sample not

17 enough.

18   I'll build on that and describe

19 how the writing sample was delivered,

20 how automated scoring is used by another

21 major company and some additional

22 challenges, and one replacement idea.

23 Well, first to put a face on this, we're

24 talking about scores and cut points.

25 But a few thousand 8th graders are right

 1 now vying for 1300 positions in five

 2 schools affected by this. For many,

 3 getting in is their aspiration and maybe

 4 even their ticket out. The decision

 5 about this has very real and personal

 6 consequences.

 7   So how does it work? Students

 8 haves 90 minutes and after they write

 9 essay, they click submit, a score

10 appears on the screen on a scale of 6 to

11 30, indicating whether they will enter

12 the lottery or not. To see how this can

13 be done differently, we look to leaders

14 in the industry. The Educational

15 Testing Service has been using automated

16 essay scoring for TOEFL, so a test of

17 English is a foreign language. It's a

18 three-hour test of reading, listening

19 and writing.

20   And, yes, the writing sample is

21 scored by computer, but there's some big

22 differences. There are two writing

23 samples, not one. It's rated by a

24 computer and a human. If the computer

25 and the human disagree, another human

1 rates it. You can retake the test as

2 many times as you want. It only counts

3 25 percent of your score and there's no

4 pass-fail.

5   In measurement, as Professor

6 Wilson started to talk about, even when

7 a test looks like it's working, we worry

8 about threats to score interpretation.

9 That is what could have gone wrong to

10 make the score suspect. Especially for

11 high stakes decisions there needs to be

12 rigorous study whenever new threats are

13 plausible, and there are a few that I

14 will add to what was already mentioned.

15   One seemingly innocent one was

16 that there no practice with the software

17 beforehand. There are two possible

18 threats here, but one is that some might

19 have provided their children with

20 practice to learn how to do better

21 against the computer and gain an

22 advantage.

23   Another concern I have has to

24 do with the possibility of bias, and I

25 think Professor Wilson and I agree on

 1   this and it takes a little unpacking.

 2   But I'd like to back up a little bit to

 3   say a little bit more about what the

 4   computer is actually doing. The

 5   computer scoring is done by modeling

 6   human ratings of essays, but humans can

 7   have bias. And because the computers

 8   model the humans, the computers can be

 9   biased.

10   ETS studies show that the

11   English as second language TOEFL test-

12   takers were upscored or downscored by

13   the software systematically and there

14   were some differences, for example,

15   among those originating in different

16   countries and continents. So efforts

17   must be expended to pretest in a

18   representative population and look for

19   and correct it in a model and score.

20   So, yes, they can score without bias,

21   but it takes a lot of work and analysis

22   to do that.

23   So let's move maybe now to what

24   can we do to replace the writing sample

25   score, what are some of our options at

1 this point. To think about it, I made

2 it easy for myself. I assume that we

3 had only a couple of weeks and no money.

4 So under those conditions, I was left

5 with a few choices. We got to use

6 existing data, and that consists of

7 standardized test scores or grades. And

8 I'm going to take us down the latter

9 path quickly, but other options should

10 still be on the table.

11   So grades, why grades you say.

12 A lot of schools use it for 9th grade

13 selection and middle school grades are a

14 good predictor of high school grades.

15 Well, aren't we using them already? Yes

16 and no. In the design of this year's

17 criteria for school selection, schools

18 require, for example, A's and B's. But

19 operationally, that's not what it means.

20 It means A's or B's, not A's and B's.

21 It means that if someone has all B's,

22 they move onto the lottery. If they

23 have all A's, they move onto the

24 lottery. There is no distinction made

25 between A's and B's. It's a 1-0.

1   There's one bit of information.

2   Well, let's use numbers instead

3   of grades. If someone got an A in

4   English and it was a 92, use the number

5   92. That increases the information

6   content from one bit to 20 bits because

7   the scores range from 80 to 100 and the

8   date is already there in the school

9   systems. But doing this just for

10 English raises the question, why just

11 English, why just a writing sample. If

12 we already have a math numerical grade,

13 let's use it. And once we're down that

14 path, we're right at GPAs. Take the

15 core subjects and do the same, and we

16 now have potentially 80 times the amount

17 of information. But we also have

18 another half year of school for the 8th

19 graders. We can fold that into a GPA.

20 We've now increased the amount of

21 information by two orders of magnitude.

22   I don't want to trivialize this

23 because correction may well be needed to

24 ensure comparability grades across

25 schools, but a lot of bad information

 1   may already be in the School District

 2   systems. Does it make sense why we want

 3   more information, not less. How many of

 4   you would bet $1,000 that you know what

 5   that image is? How many of you would

 6   bet $1,000 that you know what that image

 7   is? In high resolution even upside

 8   down, we recognize Mona Lisa. We don't

 9   recognize her in low resolution.

10   Without better information, it's not

11   just that we're going to pick the wrong

12   students. It's that some of the most

13   promising kids are not going to be seen.

14   But this is where it gets

15   interesting, at least for me. What are

16   the problems that we're grappling with

17   that are right at the border of this in

18   the new school selection process that

19   can be managed through GPAs and maybe in

20   some different ways.

21   So let me have everybody look

22   at this one. Select the student most

23   likely to succeed in high school. Which

24   one is going to be most likely to

25   succeed? Well, I'm going to go with

1   this person who got the 97 and 94.4

2   percent attendance. But the way the new

3   system is implemented, it's a 1-0. So

4   if you have an A, you get a 1. If you

5   get a B, you get a 1. If you have a

6   94.4 percent attendance, you get a 0 --

7   (Background interruption)

8   COUNCILMAN OH: I'm sorry.

9   Someone's microphone is not muted and we

10   are listening to your conversation.

11   Please mute so we don't hear your

12   conversation. Thank you.

13   MR. KLEINMAN: So in this

14   example, that person, that A is going to

15   be kicked out of the lottery. The 94.4

16   percent does not qualify to enter the

17   lottery. The 95 percent is a 1-0. So

18   that person is going to be disqualified

19   from attending any of these criteria-

20   based schools because of a one-day

21   difference. And what happened here is

22   that we've lost information. We've cut

23   it down to a couple of 1s and 0s, and

24   this person missed their shot because of

25   that one day of school.

1   There are other ways that we

2   might do this in a more sensible way by

3   preserving all the information that we

4   have. First, for the immediate fix, and

5   we could stop right here, GPAs are going

6   to be a better metric that we can

7   possibly use. Now, in the longer term

8   we can consider folding in other

9   information allowing accommodations or

10 slippage for things and not do a 1-0 for

11 example for attendance.

12   So, for example, this

13 represents the -- the thickness of the

14 bar here represents the GPA. Maybe we

15 bring in attendance, but rather than

16 lopping that person off and not allowing

17 them to qualify for the lottery or in

18 this case just to rank order in, maybe

19 the GPA gets adjusted down. It's now a

20 composite score and we can continue

21 thinking, well, what other things might

22 we want to fold in.

23   Can we think about some

24 measures of economic disadvantage?

25 Again, it will not be a 1-0. But

1   actually, would bump up this person's

2   GPA or their composite score and allow

3   us to think more critically about how

4   this sensible to rank order people. So

5   certainly we'd have to have policies in

6   place on how we would even think about

7   doing this. But that's one approach

8   that we could take rather than doing

9   this 1-0, trying to fold the information

10 in and administer it to policy level.

11   Could we fold in standardized

12 tests? Standardized tests are going to

13 be a good source of information and can

14 also be something in service here.

15 Well, certainly this is just one way of

16 doing it with continuous scores, but the

17 point is to try to preserve as much

18 information as we can. And there are

19 other logical or non-numerical methods

20 to handle this.

21   So to conclude, GPAs could

22 improve information available for school

23 selection in the very short term. Some

24 sort of composite score could

25 incorporate multi-dimensional factors

 1 important for equity, fairness and

 2 academic excellence and other options

 3 really should be explored. And I offer

 4 these ideas in the hopes that some of

 5 them might serve as kindling and bring

 6 to light debate on the full range of

 7 really complicated issues before us.

 8 Thank you.

 9   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

10 Thank you, Mr. Kleinman.

11   Will Dr. Keely McCarthy proceed

12 with her testimony.

13   DR. McCARTHY: Thank you so

14 much. Good morning and thank you for

15 allowing me to testify today. I'm here

16 as a professional and also as a parent.

17 I have an 11th grader at Central and a

18 7th grader at Carver Engineering and

19 Science. I'm also a Professor of

20 English and the Director of the Writing

21 Program at Chestnut Hill College here in

22 Philadelphia. Most of my career has

23 been spent teaching and assessing the

24 writing of first-year college students.

25   I want to make two points

 1   today. One about the use of

 2   computerized scoring of student writing,

 3   and the other about having any one

 4   assessment be a gatekeeper for

 5   admission. And I'm grateful for the

 6   other speakers today and this will be a

 7   little bit repetitive, but I hope will

 8   reinforce some of the issues.

 9   Number one, for several decades

10   scholars in my field of writing has

11   studied machine-scored assessment and

12   have come to the conclusion that it

13   should never be used for what we call

14   high stakes assignments, particularly if

15   used out of the context of a class with

16   no chance to see the algorithm or

17   prepare, no chance to learn from

18   mistakes and revise. The District's new

19   writing assessment for high school

20   admission unfortunately violates all of

21   the above.

22   Why is this a problem? We know

23   from research that in writing

24   assessments like this, that reward

25   correct or standard English sentences

1   over nonstandard English disadvantage

2   English language learners and students

3   from other language communities. In

4   addition, what is being tested is

5   questionable as a useful measurement,

6   since as we know from research the

7   algorithms are not rewarding things like

8   subtlety, humor, do not reward for

9   complexity of ideas, but rather sentence

10   structure.

11   Number two, having one

12   assessment, and now we know a flawed and

13   unfair one as a gatekeeper, is itself

14   flawed and unfair. What test can you

15   think of that is a one and done, that

16   doesn't allow you a retake. A driving

17   test? No, you can retake it. The bar

18   exam? You can retake it. The short

19   responses that students write for me as

20   they come into CHC as first-year

21   students, no. Not only do they write

22   this in-house created assessment at home

23   given lots of time, it's not the only

24   thing that we use to assess them. It is

25   scored by humans and the stakes for that

 1 score are not very high. They've

 2 already been admitted to the college.

 3   The District's model also

 4 disadvantages neurodiverse students as

 5 well as students with undiagnosed

 6 learning disabilities, who we know have

 7 difficulty decoding assignments.

 8 Finally, I want to say that giving

 9 students their score immediately and

10 making that score determine everything

11 is cruel.

12   If you have a student in

13 school, you know how stressful even

14 something like Kahn Academy for math is.

15 They don't like it very much. But with

16 those math quizzes, if they don't get

17 100, they just retake it again. The

18 stakes are very low for Kahn Academy

19 homework. This is really different. My

20 7th grader very much wants to stay at

21 Carver for high school. But I would be

22 here even if I did not have a 7th grader

23 because I am alarmed by the lack of

24 grounded research that went into this

25 move and in particular, the use of

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1 writing as a gatekeeper. Thank you very

2 much for allowing me to speak.

3   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

4 Thank you.

5   Next we have Jaya Ramji-

6 Nogales. I hope I'm not mispronouncing

7 your name. My apologies.

8   MS. RAMJI-NOGALES: Thank you

9 so much and thanks for having me here

10 today. It's Jaya Ramji-Nogales. I'm a

11 Professor of Law and Associate Dean for

12 Research at Temple Law School. I should

13 start by saying I'm here speaking in my

14 capacity and a parent as a 4th grader

15 and 8th grader in the Philadelphia

16 public systems. Nothing I say comes

17 from Temple University. It's my

18 personal insight having been through

19 this wild ride this fall.

20   Let me start with a huge thank

21 you to the Council and the Committee for

22 hosting this hearing and for providing

23 parents with the opportunity to share

24 our thoughts on the new admissions

25 process for criteria-based high schools.

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1 Let me start by making my commitments

2 clear. As a parent and educator,

3 diversity, equity and inclusion in

4 public education is at the core of the

5 work I do every day and at the core of

6 my belief system. The criteria-based

7 school that I'm most familiar with is

8 Masterman. I have ongoing concerns that

9 I have raised in various fora that

10 Masterman is not representative of the

11 beautiful diversity of our City as it

12 should be, as Councilmember Gym noted.

13   All of our students benefit

14 from schools that represent our

15 diversity, and all of Philadelphia's

16 public school students deserve to be

17 represented at the criteria-based

18 schools. So it is this commitment that

19 gives rise to my concern about the new

20 admission process, which I see is

21 prioritizing optics over meaningful

22 opportunity.

23   I want to talk about four

24 concerns with the new process that other

25 speakers have spoken about with much

 1 more expertise and much greater detail,

 2 the computer-scored essay and the

 3 concerns about its inaccuracy, zip code

 4 as a proxy for diversity, the bluntness

 5 of this tool, other barriers that are in

 6 there, the hidden obstacles that some of

 7 you have spoken about, and then this

 8 haphazard process, right, the problems

 9 with the process. And then I'll wrap up

10 by talking about where this might take

11 us, right. All of these concerns

12 together, I'm very concerned about where

13 we're going to end up, and I'll throw in

14 some potential next steps.

15   So as we heard very clearly and

16 very thoughtfully, the computer-scored

17 essay is just inappropriate for high

18 stakes assessment. I don't need to add

19 much to what the other experts have

20 said, but I will say that the website

21 itself for MI Write says that it should

22 not be used for high stakes assessment.

23 In my written testimony, I have quoted

24 directly from their website. Also, the

25 company itself said this is not the way

1   this essay should be used.

2   I'll also echo the cruelty that

3   Dr. McCarthy spoke about. In my

4   daughter's 8th grade class, they took

5   the test together and the students who

6   did not get the score they wanted

7   immediately knew in front of all their

8   classmates. It's just shocking as an

9   educator that you would do that to your

10   students.

11   Zip code as others have spoken

12   about is simply too blunt an instrument.

13   In addition to the concerns raised by

14   Councilmember Oh, I will say if the goal

15   is racial and ethnic and socioeconomic

16   diversity which I believe it should be,

17   we need a much more fine-grain analysis.

18   As Councilmember Gauthier said,

19   zip codes in Philadelphia are not

20   homogenous. My own, as I'm sure yours

21   does, include a broad range of humans

22   along race, ethnicity and socioeconomic

23   status. This is why we love our City.

24   Many diversity students are going to be

25   penalized for living in a particular zip

 1 code even if they attend an

 2 underperforming school. So why is the

 3 School District not looking at the

 4 school the student is actual attending

 5 rather than using the blunt tool of zip

 6 codes. This is surely information that

 7 is within the purview of the School

 8 District.

 9   Equity demand that the process

10 make an effort to include all

11 underserved students in the City on an

12 equal basis as previous speakers have

13 said. There are other barriers. There

14 are yet more obstacles. These ones are

15 a bit more hidden. This 95 percent

16 attendance rate that others have spoken

17 about, this is coming on the heels of a

18 pandemic in which our students were

19 forced to undergo online learning. Many

20 students through no fault of their own

21 have serious problems being present for

22 online learning. So this is a measure

23 that is cruelly unfair.

24   The Algebra 1 requirement, I

25 agree that Algebra 1 should be taught in

1   all the schools. But in underserved

2   schools, right, those students are

3   obviously not going to have the same

4   background as the high-performing

5   school, so this also seems unfair. And

6   these barriers are harder to see. But

7   as a parent, I noticed them and

8   registered deep concern.

9   As Representative Bullock said,

10   as a parent it's been breathtaking to

11   see the chaos, which just demonstrates

12   the lack of thought in the process. As

13   a very privileged parent, it has been

14   challenging to navigate this. I can

15   only imagine how difficult it has been

16   for any parent who does not have the

17   privilege as I have, as Councilmember

18   Gauthier said.

19   And as Councilmember Gym said,

20   this is not purposeful at all in any

21   way. This was announced the day school

22   selection was opened. Information about

23   zip codes and the computer essay came

24   later. Parents were scrambling to

25   obtain information, and it promises more

1   chaos ahead. The students have not

2   ranked their choices. The schools have

3   not ranked the students. So what we

4   could see going forward is one student

5   could get into all five criteria-based

6   schools. There's nothing to stop that

7   from happening while their next door

8   neighbor with identified

9   co-qualifications gets into none, and

10 then this process is going to have to

11 sort itself out over the month of the

12 spring semester. So it promises more

13 chaos going forward, which is obviously

14 going to impact different households in

15 Philadelphia differentially.

16   Also, the Algebra 1 requirement

17 cannot be assessed until the end of 8th

18 grade. So some students who may think

19 that they've gotten into a criteria-

20 based school in January may come to the

21 end of the year and not met the Algebra

22 1 requirement. This is not a process

23 that has been well-thought-through.

24   So I would as a parent said,

25 okay, if this process is increasing

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 1   equity and diversity in the Philadelphia

 2   school system, I'm just going to ride

 3   this out.  But my concern about the

 4   implications for DEI with this process

 5   is this score design could actually

 6   decrease racial, ethnic and

 7   socioeconomic diversity at the criteria-

 8   based schools.

 9             So first of all, we all

10   discussed the ways that this new process

11   can actually exclude underserved

12   students by the thoughtlessness of its

13   design.  And as prior speakers have

14   said, students who meet the criteria are

15   all eligible for the lottery on the same

16   basis regardless of race ethnicity,

17   socioeconomic status or academic

18   performance.  So we can end up in a

19   situation where the criteria-based

20   schools become less diverse because no

21   attention is being given to the

22   diversity factors that should matter

23   here.

24             So there are several next steps

25   that I think we should see.  There needs
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 1   to be reform and strategic planning as

 2   other speakers have said engaging key

 3   stakeholders, that really has not

 4   happened here. We need to fix the

 5   process this year to minimize the harm.

 6   Dr. Kleinman has given us some great

 7   ideas. Maybe we need to pause the

 8   process.

 9   But what we really need is a

10   long-term plan to diversify all of

11   Philadelphia's high schools, the

12   criteria-based high schools and the

13   catchment-based high schools. This is

14   an opportunity I believe created by the

15   Black Lives Matter movement to improve

16   public education for every student in

17   Philadelphia. Do not throw away this

18   opportunity in service of this poorly

19   devised process that prioritizes optics

20   over meaningful opportunity. Our

21   students deserve more far more than

22   this. Thank you very much for your

23   time.

24   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

25   Thank you for your testimony.

 1   Kimberly Caputo. Please

 2   proceed with your testimony.

 3   MS. CAPUTO: Good morning. Can

 4   everyone hear me?

 5   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

 6   (Nodded affirmatively.)

 7   MS. CAPUTO: Thank you for

 8   having me and allowing me to present

 9   some information, perspective on the

10   high school process for students in

11   Philadelphia. I'm Kimberly Caputo and I

12   was asked to provide this information by

13   a group of concerned parents known as

14   All Parents For Equity. I am an

15   attorney representing parents and

16   caregivers across the Commonwealth,

17   specifically in the education space.

18   I can share that Philadelphia

19   unlike other districts, including many

20   with far more resources than

21   Philadelphia, has something these

22   districts do not. And that is, as we've

23   been discussing today, options a high

24   school level. It --

25   (Background Interruption.)

 1   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

 2   Natalie, can you please mute yourself.

 3   Thank you.

 4   MS. CAPUTO: In most districts,

 5   families are limited to a natural

 6   progression which includes a single high

 7   school and perhaps a single vocational

 8   opportunity for their child. Here in

 9   Philadelphia the options are far larger.

10   However, these options are not equally

11   accessible to students with

12   disabilities. Those are the students I

13   serve and the families I represent.

14   Similarly, these options are

15   not equally accessible or available to

16   students for whom English is not their

17   primary language. I've submitted my

18   remarks in writing and I've also

19   submitted some information for review,

20   including a table which notes that the

21   population of students with disabilities

22   here in the Philadelphia School District

23   by their last official public count is

24   approximately 15 percent. For these

25   students, the opportunities appear to be

1   restricted or limited to the large

2   comprehensive high schools. They are

3   not represented consistent with other

4   children in higher performing schools.

5   In fact, the numbers should be

6   alarming. In the catchment or

7   neighborhood high schools, students with

8   disabilities represent at times numbers

9   double what the overall students with

10   disabilities population is in the

11   District overall. For example, in

12   certain schools the students with

13   disabilities represent 43 percent of the

14   overall population, 38 percent of the

15   overall population whereas a school like

16   Central, they represent 1 percent;

17   Masterman 1 percent; Academy at Palumbo

18   4 percent. Again, the information is

19   available and I would submit that it

20   should be reviewed carefully.

21   These numbers are not new.

22   They have in most instances remained the

23   same or close to the same over many,

24   many years, particularly in the magnet,

25   special admit and now what we are

 1 calling criteria-based schools. For

 2 students with disabilities who are

 3 supported with an IEP, which is an

 4 individualized education plan or a

 5 Section 504 Accommodation Plan, there is

 6 a process known in Philadelphia as the

 7 LeGare process, and I've attached to my

 8 materials a number of publicly available

 9 slides outlining that process.

10   I am challenged to see how this

11 process was employed in this new high

12 school application process, not just

13 because of the timing of the process,

14 the new process as other speakers have

15 outlined, but also because of COVID

16 students were not in school last year.

17 Many, many, many Philadelphia students

18 were in hybrid learning. What does that

19 mean? What that means realistically is

20 that parents and teens did not have an

21 opportunity to get to know that student

22 through the benefit of face-to-face

23 instruction.

24   How does that apply to this

25 LaGare process that I'm talking about?

 1 How that applies is LeGare speaks to

 2 specifically in Philadelphia the

 3 obligation of the District to provide

 4 equal access and opportunity to high

 5 performing schools for students with

 6 disabilities, English language learners

 7 and students with Section 504

 8 Accommodation Plans.

 9   How is the process supposed to

10 work? It is supposed to work through a

11 human advocacy process. The touch of

12 human to student, adult to student.

13 What do we know about this student, what

14 are his or her strengths, what are the

15 circumstances around his or her

16 disability or learning difference such

17 that criteria used as often times a

18 barrier to access should be

19 reconsidered. That is the first step of

20 LaGare, and I am unaware of how that

21 first step was integrated into this

22 process.

23   The second step of LaGare is

24 when the high school application process

25 concludes, a parent of a child with a

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 1   disability is entitled to an impartial

 2   review of that decision.  I would hope

 3   that there would be further conversation

 4   about how this protective measure was or

 5   can be integrated into any new policy

 6   for the high school application process.

 7               With regard to the separate

 8   writing requirement for the identified

 9   five schools, I would hope that every

10   student with a Section 504 Plan of

11   Accommodation and/or an IEP will be

12   provided with their legally mandated

13   necessary supports during the point at

14   which this single one-and-done testing

15   was provided.  I am alarmed, I am

16   alarmed to hear that students were

17   automatically provided with their scores

18   after taking this assessment,

19   particularly fragile students, students

20   who struggle with writing, students who

21   struggle with emotional regulation,

22   students who have been outside of the

23   typical learning environment in many

24   instances since March of 2020.  That is

25   absolutely shocking to me.
```

 1   And I appreciate that many of

 2   you may not have firsthand knowledge or

 3   even secondhand knowledge of what it

 4   means to be a student with a learning

 5   difference. And so, I offer this for

 6   consideration. Imagine you are an

 7   individual struggling with regulating

 8   your emotions. Imagine you are an

 9   individual who has tremendous

10   creativity, who has wonderful ideas and

11   they're locked in here. They're locked

12   in here because you have a barrier with

13   communicating through writing. That is

14   something you work on every single day.

15   Maybe you use speech to text to devices.

16   Maybe you have a scribe to help you

17   communicate through written expression.

18   Were those supports provided to these

19   students who are so desperately,

20   desperately in need?

21   On behalf of all students,

22   those with differences and those

23   without, I submit that all learning

24   environments should be inclusive and

25   should reflect the faces and needs of

1   the entire population of Philadelphia.

2   We are all richer for this approach.

3   There is already research showing that

4   the variety of instructional models

5   delivered during and in response to

6   COVID-19 have had a significant negative

7   impact on all students, and particularly

8   those with disabilities.

9   I appreciate the current policy

10   has as its foundation equity. That is

11   something that we as a society

12   absolutely have to unpack. And as so

13   many speakers before me have eloquently

14   stated, do the work, the work, to ensure

15   that equity happens. I only hope that

16   in the conversation that I know will

17   follow from today's hearing that some or

18   all of you be the voice for the students

19   with learning differences. Be the voice

20   for students with disabilities. Please

21   do not forget that they represent 15

22   percent of the overall population of

23   students attending public schools in

24   Philadelphia and they have a voice that

25   deserves to be heard. Thank you for

 1   this opportunity. Have a wonderful day.

 2   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

 3   Thank you. Thank you for your

 4   testimony.

 5   The Chair is going to recognize

 6   Councilman David Oh if he has or to open

 7   any questions to any member to the

 8   Committee of this panel. Councilmember

 9   Oh.

10   COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very

11   much, Chair.

12   I'll just say powerful

13   testimony, expert testimony, very clear

14   communication. I have no questions. I

15   know that we have more witnesses. I

16   appreciate them staying on this virtual

17   meeting. And so, I will not have

18   questions, but I certainly thank the

19   witnesses for spending this time with

20   us, their very valuable time. Thank you

21   so much.

22   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

23   Thank you. And if there are no

24   questions from any of my colleagues, we

25   will move to the next panel.

 1   Will the Clerk read the names

 2   of the following panel.

 3   THE CLERK: The next panel --

 4   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

 5   Karyn Lynch -- go ahead.

 6   THE CLERK: Okay. I'm sorry.

 7   The next panel is Karyn Lynch and

 8   Dr. Sabriya Jubilee.

 9   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

10   Dr. Jubilee and Karyn Lynch, who's --

11   DR. JUBILEE: Yes. Thank you.

12   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

13   -- going to go first?

14   DR. JUBILEE: I'll go first.

15   Yes. Thank you. Good morning, members

16   of City Council, and thank you for the

17   opportunity to speak with you today.

18   Councilmember Oh, thank you for

19   scheduling this hearing to discuss the

20   school selection process. For the

21   record, I am Dr. Sabriya Kalia Jubilee,

22   Chief of Equity for the School District

23   of Philadelphia.

24   Since the beginning of

25   education reform movements, one of the

1 stated goals has been to make education

2 accessible to all, a public good. While

3 many have aspired to see education as

4 the great equalizer, most reforms have

5 fallen short of that mission. This

6 history is not only of national impact

7 but have very much been embedded in the

8 history of the School District of

9 Philadelphia. And in 2021, we are still

10 contending with ways to make education

11 accessible and equitable for all

12 students, especially those from

13 historically marginalized communities.

14   On June 15, 2020 in the wake of

15 the murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud

16 Aubery, George Floyd and countless

17 others, as a District we released or

18 statement on anti-racism. In this

19 statement, we committed to becoming an

20 anti-racist equitable organization by

21 uprooting policies, deconstructing

22 processes and eradicating practices that

23 create systems of privilege and power

24 for one group over the other.

25   The upending of privilege

1   highlighted here is not simply in

2   reference to a configuration of numbers

3   or an assessment of differences in skin

4   color or features, but rather speaks to

5   the destruction of a system and the

6   dismantling institutionalization of

7   norms. It doesn't just ask for us to

8   set aside seats as a way to appease a

9   few, but rather challenges us to explore

10   questions of why, who and for what.

11   Through the school selection

12   process, we have the opportunity to

13   redesign a process that from inception

14   to current practice has only truly

15   benefited a small group of stakeholders,

16   many of whom do not reflect the majority

17   demographic of our School District or

18   City. But this presentation, I am not

19   speaking solely about visibility, but

20   more about the impact of opportunity,

21   access and power.

22   As a teaching and learning

23   organization, our mission is to deliver

24   on the civil right of every child in

25   Philadelphia to an excellent public

 1   school education and ensure all children

 2   graduate from high school ready to

 3   succeed, fully engaged as a citizen of

 4   our world.

 5   Our vision is to see all

 6   children having access to a great school

 7   close to where they live. But in order

 8   to do this, we have to start by

 9   addressing the areas where the

10   foundational inequities exist. Over the

11   past 20 months in the midst of a global

12   pandemic and ongoing racial tension,

13   there has been an outcry for equity, but

14   seemingly only a tolerance for equality.

15   Equity and equality are not

16   synonymous. Equity in its truest sense

17   is about fairness and the mission to

18   achieve balance, but the conundrum we

19   experience is that the push for balance,

20   this cause for fairness is needed

21   because deficit has been more prominent.

22   Equity is a responsive factor when lack,

23   disenfranchisement and partiality

24   exists. Because of this, the concept of

25   all experiencing the same thing to the

 1   same degree cannot actually co-exist.

 2   For example, we cannot argue

 3   against preferred zip codes, but

 4   advocate for automatic matriculation of

 5   middle schoolers into high school. We

 6   cannot say we care about diversity in

 7   schools yet believe that expanding the

 8   pool to include more qualified students

 9   from marginalized identities will

10   compromise the academic quality.

11   As highlighted in the initial

12   press briefing and several inquiries

13   after, the amendments posed in this

14   year's school selection is a small step

15   in the direction of change. There is

16   still much more we need to understand.

17   We must continue to ask ourselves the

18   hard questions such as where do we see

19   alignment and misalignment between the

20   governing policy for school selection

21   and the way it manifests in schools, is

22   there consistency in the admissions

23   process across schools, who is impacted

24   and how.

25   And the fundamental question of

1   action, how can we create greater access

2   and inclusion for students to

3   participate in the school selection

4   process, especially those most

5   traditionally left out. While some may

6   argue this change feels sudden and

7   therefore should be halted until we can

8   tweak the nuances, in the words of

9   Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., justice

10   delayed is justice denied.

11   What's important to understand

12   here is we are not just changing steps

13   in a process. We are working to shift

14   patterns within the system. Our hope

15   and goal is to use our focus on equity

16   as a way to re-envision the entire K-12

17   experience for our students, all of our

18   students. And to do this, we have to

19   take time for unlearning and relearning

20   ways of doing schooling and explore

21   where there is a need for change, both

22   immediate and long-term. The lasting

23   impacts of the amendments made in this

24   year's school selection process cannot

25   be known at this time. And while there

1   are no guarantees, we must courageously

2   strive for change. Our students are

3   owed it.

4   As I close, I want to leave you

5   with this quote by Isabel Wilkerson,

6   author of Caste. "We in the developed

7   world are like homeowners who inherited

8   a house on a piece of land that is

9   beautiful on the outside but whose soil

10 is unstable loam and rock, heaving and

11 contracting over generations. And yes,

12 not one of us was here when this house

13 was built, but here we are the current

14 occupants of a property with stressed

15 cracks and bowed walls and fissures

16 built into the foundation. We are the

17 heirs to whatever is right or wrong with

18 it. We did not erect the uneven pillars

19 or joists, but they are ours to deal

20 with now and any further deterioration

21 is, in fact, on our hands." Thank you

22 for the opportunity to speak. That

23 concludes my comments.

24   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

25 Thank you, Dr. Jubilee.

1   Ms. Karyn Lynch.

2   MS. LYNCH: Thank you. Good

3   morning. Good morning, Councilmembers

4   and members of the public. My name is

5   Karen Lynch and I am the Chief of

6   Student Support Services for the School

7   District of Philadelphia. As it has

8   become the theme today, I will share

9   that I am not a parent of any child that

10 is attending any School District school.

11   I have no relatives with

12 children that are attending School

13 District schools, and my grandchildren,

14 one grandchild, attends school in New

15 York City. Her parents refuse to leave

16 New York City so there's not a thought

17 that she will ever attend a School

18 District of Philadelphia school to my

19 great disappointment.

20   I am a child advocate by trade

21 and by passion, and I have spent I would

22 say 75 percent of my time in

23 Philadelphia dedicated and devoted to

24 the children of this City and to their

25 educational attainment. I don't believe

 1   I have any conflict at all, just passion

 2   and commitment to the students.

 3   I am here today to speak to you

 4   about the school selection process

 5   conducted annually in the School

 6   District of Philadelphia. School

 7   selection is a method used by any City

 8   resident seeking to attend any available

 9   District school in Grades K through 12

10   that is outside of their immediate

11   community. The work that we have

12   engaged in with regard to improving the

13   school selection process is not new.

14   Improvements have been made for

15   the better part of the last 10 years,

16   first starting with the evaluation of

17   our process, who has access to our

18   process, who engages in our process and

19   that process was conducted independently

20   by the Pew Foundation. And each year we

21   have analyzed, evaluated the results of

22   our school selection process in order to

23   determine what worked, what didn't work,

24   how closely we're coming to improving

25   the analysis that was identified by and

 1   the recommendations identified in the

 2   Pew study.

 3   This study and the subsequent

 4   evaluations conducted by the School

 5   District are readily available this year

 6   online and we make them readily

 7   available -- is that me making that

 8   noise? I'm not --

 9   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

10   No. I'm going to ask Solomon Jones, if

11   you can mute yourself. Thank you.

12   MS. LYNCH: Okay. I thought

13   that might be my microphone. Sorry.

14   And each year we make improvements to

15   the program to our process, looking back

16   to the Pew analysis and determining

17   where there are opportunities for

18   improvement, what worked and what did

19   not work. Due largely to the COVID-19

20   pandemic last year, the School District

21   announced we would not make core

22   changes -- that we would make core

23   changes in the process because we were

24   not utilizing the PSSA results, and that

25   was one of several criteria that we have

 1   used throughout for years.

 2   At that time, we indicated that

 3   we would seek input and feedback on what

 4   criteria should be used. Several have

 5   made note of the survey that was

 6   conducted. We did the survey. We also

 7   had several public meetings that were

 8   held by our Board of Education where

 9   families have the opportunity to give

10   input where we received input from our

11   Board members, and those meetings all

12   allowed for the opportunity for public

13   meeting and for individuals to share

14   their opinions and ideas. One person

15   that we heard from who is on the list of

16   speakers this morning is Stephanie King

17   who's a parent, and I'm going to speak

18   to several of her comments in just a few

19   minutes.

20   In addition to the removal of

21   the PSSA as a criteria for the school

22   selection process last year -- this

23   year, not last year, our District was

24   also impacted by the growing national

25   attention to racism, mainly the murder

 1   of George Floyd among others. As a

 2   result as an organization, we committed

 3   to examining all of our processes,

 4   procedures and practices to ensure

 5   equity and (inaudible). For more than a

 6   year, the School District obtained

 7   feedback --

 8   (Background interruption.)

 9   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

10   Karyn, hold on a second. Can someone

11   mute themselves please. Please be

12   considerate of our speakers. Thank you.

13   MS. LYNCH: Shall I continue,

14   Madam Chair?

15   COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

16   Absolutely. My apologies.

17   MS. LYNCH: Thank you. For

18   more than a year, the School District

19   obtained feedback about the school

20   selection process and listened to

21   individuals and representatives of

22   groups to inform the improvements to the

23   school selection process. Several

24   public meetings held by the Board of

25   Education as its members considered the

 1   Board's goals and guardrails.

 2   One indicator for the

 3   guardrails is ending racist practices as

 4   I've shared in our policies and

 5   procedures. At these meetings, we

 6   listened to Board members who stress

 7   their interests and concerns about the

 8   school selection process. Board members

 9   asked and again the public had the

10   opportunity to hear and participate that

11   our practices provide greater access and

12   transparency to all residents regardless

13   of their ethnicity, the language spoken

14   in their homes, the school that was

15   attended or their demographic and more.

16   Board members questioned

17   individual school criteria, how it was

18   that all schools did not have a

19   standardized criteria and stressed the

20   importance of eliminating criteria that

21   relatively few students could meet.

22   There was also discussion about who

23   actually makes decisions in the school

24   selection process and many attributed

25   the decision-making of who gets into a

1   school and who does not get into a

2   school to an individual person in each

3   of the criteria-based schools and

4   likened it to a wizard standing behind a

5   screen or curtain and arbitrarily

6   deciding based on information that was

7   beyond a student's data and educational

8   experience who would and who would not

9   attend criteria-based schools.

10   At the public meeting for the

11   Board of Education's Policy 206, Board

12   members again asked if we eliminated

13   barriers, and they stressed that we

14   eliminate barriers to student access,

15   maximize opportunities for more students

16   to have access to selective schools and

17   stressed the need to eliminate the

18   perception that middle school enrollment

19   was a means to high school acceptance

20   when there was no policy or procedure

21   that guarantees or promises a student in

22   middle school would be accepted to the

23   same named high school.

24   In fact, students in these

25   middle schools have always been required

1   to apply to the high school through the

2   school selection process. That was not

3   a change. We also conducted a school

4   selection survey which I shared earlier,

5   and asked students, parents, principals,

6   counselors, community members to share

7   ideas and comments about the school

8   selection process and additional

9   criteria that could be used in lieu of a

10   PSSA score. Again, that was not the

11   only input that we received to the

12   process.

13   Over the past weeks, I've been

14   asked why do we not phase in the process

15   improvements. Each year for nearly 10

16   years we have made improvements to the

17   process. For example, the process has

18   evolved over the last 10 years to be one

19   that no longer occurs three times a

20   year, but one that occurs once a year.

21   The process was moved from a paper

22   process to one that is online, so more

23   could have access to the process --

24   (Background interruption.)

25   MS. LYNCH: The process is

 1   available now in nine various languages

 2   that are frequently spoken within the

 3   School District. Students hoping to

 4   attend a career technology school, what

 5   we call a CTE school, or a city-wide

 6   admission school no longer have criteria

 7   based on grades, attendance or PSSA

 8   scores. This has increased access and

 9   enrollment options for more students and

10   it has filled seats that previously were

11   left empty because of criteria. Again,

12   increasing access is extremely important

13   to this process. It's been noted by the

14   Superintendent as well as our Board. It

15   was stressed within the Pew study 10

16   years ago.

17   For years, students applying to

18   attend a noncriteria K to 8 out of

19   catchment or zip code preference school

20   all participated in a lottery. That's

21   right, zip code preference is not new to

22   the School District of Philadelphia's

23   school selection process. Lottery is

24   not new to the School District of

25   Philadelphia's school selection process.

1 Making changes annually to this process

2 is not new to the School District's

3 school selection process.

4   In fact, only 21 of our 250

5 schools did not prior to now use the

6 lottery. And the writing sample is not

7 new. For the past three years, the

8 writing sample has been used as part of

9 the school selection process at Parkway

10 Center City Middle College. In the

11 three years that the sample has been

12 used, no comments have ever been made.

13 No negative comments have ever been

14 made. I repeat, no negative comments in

15 the past three years have been made.

16 When several criteria, school principals

17 asked this year to include the writing

18 sample among the criteria for their

19 school selection process. There was no

20 reason to not agree and support their

21 requests because the writing sample had

22 been used for three years and the

23 principal of Parkway Center City Middle

24 College praised the involvement of the

25 writing sample in the criteria as well

 1   as the work with the company that

 2   provided the sample for the last three

 3   years as well as this year.

 4   Along the last year and a half,

 5   I would say 18 months, we have heard

 6   from many parents as part of our

 7   listening, our hearing and our engaging

 8   as we work to improve the school's

 9   selection process. We heard from

10   parents who believe only children from

11   certain schools have the privilege to

12   attend our more selective criteria-based

13   schools. We heard from parents that

14   said students attending select primary

15   schools have a direct path to elite

16   schools or who you know or the position

17   that you hold determines what schools a

18   child will attend.

19   We heard from child and

20   education advocates who asked why we did

21   not establish priorities in this year's

22   process for homeless children and foster

23   children and special education children.

24   They said we had the chance to make

25   improvements and we didn't go far

 1   enough. I mentioned earlier one of the

 2   parents who's on your list of speakers

 3   today. We have sat and met several

 4   times. And most recently, again with

 5   Stephanie King, a mother of two children

 6   attending one of our District schools.

 7   She's passionate about this topic.

 8   She's told us that our process

 9   contributes to segregation and most

10   recently shared and I quote, "Our

11   changes are a step in the right

12   direction, but we did not go far

13   enough." That was a compliment from

14   Stephanie King.

15   This is all to say that we did

16   not reach these changes. We did not

17   make these changes without input from

18   others, and all of our efforts are to

19   improve access for our students. It is

20   a bold move. Yes, it actually it is.

21   The students in the City of Philadelphia

22   deserve bold moves to support their

23   educational attainment and their

24   educational achievement. Yes, they do.

25   Should we ask students who have been

1   denied access to wait yet another year

2   while we delay, while we phase in

3   improvements? I'll let you internalize

4   the response to that question.

5   We have upheld a process and I

6   use the collectively --

7   (Background interruption.)

8   COUNCILMAN OH: I'm sorry. Can

9   I just interrupt to say that I'm not

10   sure where all that static noise is

11   coming from. Could everyone just double

12   check that you're muted. I can hear,

13   but it is difficult to hear. So, yeah,

14   everybody please check to make sure

15   you're muted today so that we can

16   continue with our witness. Thank you.

17   MS. LYNCH: I'm nearly

18   finished, Councilman Oh. I just have a

19   couple more sentences. We collectively

20   have upheld a process that we've known

21   for years. And again, I cite the Pew

22   study that was conducted nearly 10 years

23   ago. We've known for year that this

24   process is inequitable and in some cases

25   not even equal. This is not the

 1   beginning of change as I have pointed

 2   out, and this is not the end.

 3   I think that as we move forward

 4   there are other pressing aspects of this

 5   process that we need to examine, and

 6   I'll just name a few. Kim Caputo

 7   identified special education. That is

 8   absolutely something that we are looking

 9   at more, although there have been

10   improvements this year to the process of

11   LaGare. Sibling preference is another

12   preference that exists in our process

13   that we should look at.

14   The GPA that you mentioned

15   earlier, Councilman, we actually -- and

16   you and other speakers, we don't have a

17   GPA for the 7th grade or for middle

18   school. And establishing as the GPA

19   just as several of the speakers pointed

20   out would be a much better approach to

21   this effort. So looking at how to do

22   that is definitely on the list for

23   improvements next year.

24   I want to thank you for this

25   opportunity to speak today and to share

1 just a little bit of about the process.

2 I will do my very best to remain in the

3 hearing throughout the entire

4 opportunity for feedback and to hear

5 comments from your speakers. And again,

6 I think it's extremely important to

7 listen and to hear. And I think the

8 hearing you have today, the resolution

9 as well as the hearing each provide the

10 opportunity for us to hear more, to gain

11 more input and more insight. So this

12 concludes my comments today. Thank you.

13   COUNCILMAN OH: I believe

14 Councilmember Mark Squilla will be

15 taking over as Chair.

16   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes.

17 Thank you very much. I just have a

18 quick question before we open up

19 questions to the Committee.

20   As we heard and I know the

21 School District had set this forth and I

22 understand there was a survey that was

23 sent out there, did we feel it necessary

24 also to meet with the principals of

25 those schools and other stakeholders in

 1 that process as this new policy was

 2 being implemented?

 3   MS. LYNCH: Councilman, I will

 4 share with you that Principals,

 5 Assistant Superintendents, other chiefs

 6 within the School District including our

 7 Academic Chief, our Chief of Research

 8 and Evaluation, you have met today our

 9 Chief of our Diversity Equity Office,

10 DEI is extremely important, there are

11 several other chiefs that have been

12 actively involved as well as principals.

13 Through our equity lens review, we

14 included parents, students, we included

15 not just the principals that are leaders

16 of criteria-based schools, but we

17 included K through 8 principals that are

18 sending students to criteria-based

19 students as well as principals who are

20 managing and leading criteria-based

21 school. So K to 8 principals were

22 included, yes. Counselors --

23   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And

24 everybody thought that these policies

25 set forth was a good idea and that that

 1   would enhance what we're trying to do

 2   with equity and inclusion. And you

 3   heard some of the concerns from at least

 4   several of early testifiers, including

 5   our State Rep Donna Bullock and the

 6   concerns that you have heard. Do you

 7   think this policy addresses that?

 8   MS. LYNCH: I would answer by

 9   saying that each time I have an

10   opportunity to speak about the process,

11   people become more informed. I would

12   say that what has been attributed to the

13   changes that took place this year have

14   been processes that have -- have been

15   elements of the process that have

16   existed for years. I would share that

17   when the representative spoke to middle

18   schoolers and their enrollment in the

19   high school, that that has been a

20   de facto process that specifically has

21   been addressed at public hearings where

22   we were actually given the direction

23   that we should make the seats that are

24   available in all of our schools

25   accessible to students from across and

 1 beyond.

 2   Do I think that each person has

 3 a perspective that merits consideration?

 4 I would respectfully say yes that I do.

 5 And I will say that, as I just shared,

 6 this is the beginning. This is the

 7 beginning with more to come with regard

 8 to access and equity, and I take the

 9 comments that were offered into

10 consideration.

11   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay. It

12 is the beginning, but I mean it's a

13 policy that's in place. It's not the

14 beginning of a process. I mean, there's

15 already decisions made. So I think that

16 is what is concerning. And also, if

17 we're looking at that, are we looking to

18 grow our facilities and grow the number

19 of people, and we talked about middle

20 school and how that proceeds into high

21 school. But instead of limiting the

22 number of seating, increasing those

23 seats in these schools so that more

24 people have access to them. Is that

25 also a consideration?

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 1              MS. LYNCH:  I think that you

 2   have hit on something that absolutely

 3   has to be a consideration and is a

 4   consideration.  And making more seats

 5   available is absolutely something that

 6   we should do, that we have to do and

 7   that it has been a consideration, and

 8   we're actively trying to make that

 9   happen.

10              COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:  Okay. I

11   mean, whether it's using these schools

12   and moving them into bigger spaces or

13   swapping with another school or moving

14   the middle school out of one school and

15   adding more high school spots, whatever

16   it may be, I think those conversations

17   are also important.

18              I know there are several

19   questions by some of our colleagues.  I

20   would say, Councilmember Oh, if you have

21   a couple of questions.

22              MS. LYNCH:  I thank you for

23   your support with the idea of increasing

24   the number of seats.  That support is

25   valuable.  Thank you.
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 1   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes. Very

 2   much so.

 3   COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you,

 4   Chair. I have some questions.

 5   To either witness, I appreciate

 6   the work you've put in. I know it is a

 7   complex topic. I have stated my

 8   concerns. I actually do not agree with

 9   it. However, I do recognize that it is

10   something that you feel passionately

11   about and you are responding to the

12   instructions of the School Board.

13   I will note for the record that

14   we did invite the Board Chair and we did

15   invite Dr. Hite. They are not before

16   this Committee. And so, it may be

17   unfair to pose some of these questions

18   to you, but I will. And if you cannot

19   answer them, just let me know.

20   Based on the concerns that were

21   raised by the first panel, computer

22   selection, a kind of blunt use of zip

23   codes, lack of more data in terms of

24   refining between one candidate and the

25   next and the sudden to many people,

 1   albeit you've talked about the process,

 2   but to many, many people the sudden

 3   surprise of a new process, are you in a

 4   position to pause this process or do we

 5   have to talk to the Chair, the Board,

 6   Dr. Hite or somebody else?

 7   MS. LYNCH: You know, I

 8   definitely will encourage you to talk to

 9   others, but I will share with you just a

10   few things that I know about this

11   process. So this is the process by

12   which students are identified to attend

13   certain schools. We have close to

14   20,000 students, both School District of

15   Philadelphia students as well as

16   students who reside in the City who are

17   dependent on this process as we have

18   shared today to determine what their

19   options are going to be for attending

20   school next year.

21   This process is not just a

22   process for enrollment into other

23   schools. This is a process that also

24   feed into our budgeting process so that

25   we can determine based on not just

1 enrollment in schools, but certainly

2 consideration of enrollment in schools,

3 but the budgets will be for individual

4 schools based on how many students are

5 attending. And it also feeds into the

6 hiring process for teachers and

7 school-based staff in all of our

8 schools, which is predominantly or

9 greatly I would say, dependent on the

10 enrollment.

11   So if this process does not

12 continue or if this process is further

13 delayed, it's going to impact the

14 budgets for schools, therefore, the

15 budgets and the timing of the budget to

16 our Board, the timing of the budgeting

17 process with regard to the City Council.

18 It will impact hearings. It will impact

19 how dollars will be allocated. It will

20 impact the hiring of sufficient staff or

21 the attempt to hire sufficient staff and

22 determine where they are going to work

23 for the fall.

24   And so, all of those factors

25 that I put at the top of the list,

1 students knowing what their future is

2 going to be and students knowing where

3 they are going to attend school in the

4 next few months as they are making

5 decisions now as other options outside

6 of the School District of Philadelphia

7 are also presenting themselves with

8 regard to other public schools as well

9 as private schools. The timing is such

10 that families will want to know exactly

11 what the outcomes are going to be for

12 their child so they will be in a

13 position to make those decisions. I

14 hope that's helpful.

15   COUNCILMAN OH: Yes. Thank you

16 for your answer. I will say that I do

17 interpret the situation differently. I

18 think people, at least who I've heard

19 from and I have not heard from

20 everybody, want a fair process, an

21 insightful and just process and a

22 predictable process.

23   And I think that raises this

24 other point, that part of it is that

25 Philadelphia is the only school district

1   out of 707, I guess it depends on how

2   you define the school districts, in

3   Pennsylvania that does not have an

4   elected School Board. Basically, the

5   people do not elect their School Board

6   representative. They don't know who's

7   their School Board representative. It's

8   a very distant process as far as I've

9   ever seen, because the Mayor basically

10 appoints nine people, confirmed by

11 Council since the return of the School

12 District from the SRC, but people do not

13 feel in many cases that their School

14 District is responsive to them, and

15 perhaps this is a watershed moment where

16 people are trying to express themselves.

17 And whether the School Board agrees or

18 doesn't agree, they are frustrated that

19 somehow what they're saying is not being

20 received in a way that they feel is

21 meaningful.

22   I think basically -- and I will

23 say that I did introduce a bill that we

24 would have five elected School Board

25 members, let the Mayor appoint four and

 1 there's no alternative to that. Nobody

 2 has introduced a bill that all nine will

 3 be elected, so I will put that out

 4 there, that I've had this existing

 5 concern.

 6   But I see the problem as being

 7 that there are many students who want a

 8 good education. There are many students

 9 who drop out of our schools. There are

10 many unfortunate situations where there

11 are not parents at home to guide them

12 and many other things. But there are

13 many students and parents who want their

14 child to have a good education, but

15 there are very few seats.

16   So we then got charter schools,

17 which you have to hit a lottery in order

18 to go, and people apply for all

19 different types of charter schools,

20 whatever it is. If they hit a lottery,

21 they can go, but most people can't hit

22 the lottery so then they look at their

23 neighborhood school.

24   They could go to a private

25 school if they had the money. Most

1 people don't. Some people can leave the

2 City, and I think we've had 35,000

3 African Americans, mostly in middle

4 class, leave our City for a less

5 expensive lifestyle outside of the City

6 with better school choices. So charter

7 schools, private schools outside of

8 Philadelphia and that leaves the magnet

9 schools, the criteria-based schools.

10   Up until now -- and those seats

11 have not increased. Up until now, there

12 was a level of self-discrimination,

13 effort, grit, planning to get themselves

14 into the school, but now that's a

15 lottery. I think that is what's most

16 disturbing that they are trying to

17 express to the School District. And

18 basically what I'm hearing is that the

19 process will continue the way it is.

20   MS. LYNCH: Councilman, I can

21 share several things with you. First, I

22 would share with you that over the last

23 10 years there have been increases in

24 the number of seats, so there's more

25 seats available in criteria-based

 1   schools than there were 10 years ago.

 2   I would also share with you --

 3   and I can't speak to, you know, I don't

 4   have an opinion one way or another,

 5   although I understand your point about

 6   elected versus voluntary. But I will

 7   share with you that the nine members

 8   that are our School Board members, and

 9   many will be shocked to hear me say

10   this, they spend an incredible amount of

11   time working to understand, to know, to

12   impact. Their domain is policy and they

13   are actively involved as volunteers.

14   They spend inordinate amounts of time,

15   not just in meetings, but also

16   advocating for the School District of

17   Philadelphia and more importantly for

18   the children of Philadelphia to obtain

19   strong, good educational attainment.

20   I'd also point out the approach

21   that the Board is taking with regard to

22   the goals that it has established and

23   the guardrails to protect those goals,

24   but the Board is not just saying, but

25   their actions are actively involved in

1   the process of ensuring the improvements

2   for all students of looking at the data

3   that is available and they request for

4   student achievement with the goal of

5   improving the quality of our schools,

6   the education that students are able to

7   receive and the Board's goals and

8   guardrails process also allows on a

9   monthly basis for members of the

10   community to tune in and find out about

11   the status of our schools and hold us

12   accountable, the Superintendent as well

13   as all of us who work for the

14   Superintendent accountable for achieving

15   those goals and monitoring on an ongoing

16   basis of progress.

17   And I lastly will say to you I

18   know of no other system in this City,

19   and you can correct me if I'm wrong,

20   that allows any citizen to come forward

21   and speak each and every month at a

22   Board meeting for three minutes about

23   the topic of their choice. And trust

24   me, last Board meeting I was here until

25   11:45. And probably one of the most

1 important parts of the evening was

2 hearing from citizens, residents,

3 parents, students about our processes,

4 our procedures. And the Board holds us

5 accountable for the things that we hear

6 and the things that people say, and they

7 investigate every concern and they

8 actively pursue every issue. And so,

9 those are the few things that I would

10 say in response. I thank you.

11   COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very

12 much. I would like to say that while I

13 do disagree, I have tremendous respect

14 for you and I appreciate your work. And

15 while I don't know Dr. Jubilee, I

16 appreciate the passion and the work.

17   My last question, Chair, is

18 this: So as we look at our magnet

19 schools, for example, Bodine or Bodeen

20 50 percent African American; 21 percent

21 Latino; 9 percent Caucasian; 12 percent

22 Asian; School to the Future 98 percent

23 African American; Palumbo, 40.4 African

24 American, 9.5 Latino, 9 percent

25 Caucasian -- I'm sorry, 9.5 percent

```
 1   Latino, 14 percent Caucasian, 31.1

 2   percent Asian; Carver, 65.3 African

 3   American, 9.7 percent Latino, 6.9

 4   percent Caucasian, 12.6 percent Asian;

 5   Parkway 72.4 African American, 15.1

 6   percent Latino, 2.2 percent Caucasian,

 7   6.7 percent Asian.  And finally Girls

 8   High, 66.4 African American, 10.1

 9   Latino, 8.6 percent Caucasian, 14.9

10   percent Asian.

11              So as you said, there are

12   magnet schools.  And among all of the

13   magnet schools, what is the reason for

14   example choosing Carver or Parkway or

15   Palumbo over for example Girls High or

16   School of the Future or Bodine?  I mean,

17   they seem pretty diverse in the sense

18   that when we're looking at, especially

19   the issue today, having opportunities

20   for especially underserved children or

21   African Americans or other minorities to

22   go to magnet schools?  From what I've

23   seen, the majority population in all

24   magnet schools in Philadelphia are

25   minority, although the breakouts are
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 1 different, but primarily in Masterman

 2 and Central. Could you explain how one

 3 criteria-based school was selected over

 4 the other for the process?

 5   MS. LYNCH: We have 21

 6 criteria-based schools. One of the 21

 7 has used -- you said the writing sample,

 8 yes?

 9   COUNCILMAN OH: Well, no. Is

10 it because they have a -- like in other

11 words for Carver, is it because they are

12 a feeder school? Is it because Carver

13 has a middle school? Is it because

14 Masterman has an elementary school? Is

15 it an effort to kind of change the fact

16 that a lot of these kids in the

17 elementary school or middle school will

18 then go into Carver or Masterman at a

19 higher rate than is available to the

20 entire City or what is the reason -- for

21 example, Parkway, 72.4 percent African

22 American. Why does that need to be

23 overhauled?

24   MS. LYNCH: Okay. You're

25 looking at the racial demographic of

 1   each of these schools --

 2   COUNCILMAN OH: Yes.

 3   MS. LYNCH: -- and a good deal

 4   of the discussion has been about access

 5   and equity to these schools, so it's not

 6   just based on racial dynamics. It's

 7   based on students who traditionally have

 8   been disenfranchised from the process.

 9   Students who meet the qualifications,

10   who live in areas where they have not

11   had the opportunities that others have

12   had because the decision-making has been

13   by data based more on the school that

14   they attended perhaps than their

15   educational qualifications. And that's

16   how we looked at the zip codes. The zip

17   codes are not reflective of the

18   demographics you're talking about. The

19   zip codes are reflective of students

20   living in areas of the City that had the

21   qualifications to attend, but the lowest

22   representation in four of our schools.

23   COUNCILMAN OH: I understand

24   that. And I will state that the issue

25   was raised, but the students in those

```
 1   zip codes could be wealthy White

 2   children, could be -- in other words,

 3   the preference now given to the zip code

 4   may, in fact, increase the number of

 5   students, but it may actually result in

 6   less diversity of race and

 7   socioeconomic, but it will increase

 8   perhaps the number of students from that

 9   zip code.  Anyway that's the quandary.

10   I'm going to stop because I know there's

11   more witnesses, and I appreciate your

12   answering the questions.

13           Thank you very much, Chair.

14           COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:  Thank you,

15   Councilmember.

16           I know Councilmember Brooks

17   also had some questions for this panel.

18   Councilmember, are you available?

19           COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:  Yes.   I

20   have just a few questions.  Earlier on

21   someone mentioned about special admits

22   and children with special needs or

23   English language learners.  What

24   supports will be in place to make sure

25   that all children are successful in
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1 special admit schools and are there

2 already things in place for all children

3 to be successful in these special

4 admission schools once they get access?

5   MS. LYNCH: I would say to you

6 that that is extremely important. I

7 would say to you that accommodations

8 have been made through the school

9 selection process for students that are

10 English language learners as well as

11 students who have special education

12 needs. I would say to you that it's

13 extremely important for those resources

14 to be available and built in schools for

15 students that have additional needs.

16   COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: And I

17 just also want to say it's good to see

18 that the District is making important

19 steps moving forward and trying to stay

20 true to the equity lens, but I'm hoping

21 to see more transparency in the future

22 so we can kind of prevent some of the

23 deeper -- this discussion that we're

24 having around the process. So I do want

25 to recognize the changes that I've seen.

 1   All of my children have went to

 2 a special admit high school. And all of

 3 my children are like 5 to 10 years

 4 apart, so I've been doing this whole

 5 thing for a long time and I've noticed

 6 the changes that have been made, but I

 7 just want to make sure that more

 8 transparency is in the process. And

 9 also, what or how or both in the zip

10 codes that are being recognized inform

11 that this was something that was coming

12 down the pike. Was there any work

13 around that, like the outreach to the

14 specific zip codes that will be

15 impacted?

16   MS. LYNCH: The outreach that

17 we did with regard to the zip codes was

18 to share with individuals that are in

19 the zip codes the opportunity to be able

20 to -- the recognition that there will be

21 a priority that will be given, that was

22 for our internal students, and as well

23 we've shared information on our web page

24 and highlighted the zip codes each time

25 that we got the opportunity to speak

 1 about the prioritization. But I would

 2 share with you that the prioritization

 3 is going to happen automatically through

 4 our system, and it's not something that

 5 parents have to sign up in order to

 6 benefit from.

 7   COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Yeah, I

 8 wasn't thinking about in terms of

 9 signing up. I was just wondering how

10 parents would know that that would be

11 something that they should be paying

12 closer attention to in various zip

13 codes, and I'm primarily talking about

14 parents in traditional neighborhood

15 elementary schools trying to get into

16 middle or traditional K to 8 trying to

17 get into high school.

18   Was there any indication or any

19 information sent out directly to parents

20 within those zip codes for them to be

21 paying closer attention to the process?

22   MS. LYNCH: I believe as I said

23 that there was information that was sent

24 as well we shared with counselors,

25 school principals, school-based staff so

1 that they could promote among the

2 families within their schools the zip

3 codes. And the zip codes are on the Web

4 as we've encouraged people as they've

5 applied to note that.

6   COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Okay.

7 Thank you so much for that. And I think

8 what I want to kind of put in this space

9 is that the real goal is a Philadelphia

10 where every child has the supports they

11 need at every school. And our parents

12 don't have to feel like you have to earn

13 or win your way into an excellent

14 education. That's not what education

15 should be about. And I'm hoping for us

16 to continue to change the trajectory of

17 what a quality education looks like for

18 our kids so it's not about earning or

19 winning your way into a good education,

20 but it's something that all kids in all

21 schools in every neighborhood have the

22 opportunity to be a part of. So thank

23 you so much for your time.

24   MS. LYNCH: Councilwoman, your

25 support as we work to do that is going

1 to be extremely important and very much

2 appreciated.

3   COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: I have a

4 child that's in this process right now

5 so I am full fledge in the process and I

6 will continue to be paying attention and

7 watching closely. But thank you again

8 for your time.

9   MS. LYNCH: Thank you.

10   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,

11 Councilmember Brooks.

12   Are there any other questions

13 from anybody on the Committee for this

14 panel?

15   (No response.)

16   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Hearing

17 none, hopefully you guys can hang in

18 there for a little bit and listen to

19 some of the people testify on the next

20 panel. Thank you so much for your

21 testimony.

22   We'll now go into Panel 3.

23 Sherice Sargent, if you're connected if

24 you could unmute and then state your

25 name for the record and proceed to

1 testify. Before you do that, just to

2 let you know that Tanya Folk will be up

3 next after Sherice. Go ahead, Sherice.

4   MS. SARGENT: Good morning. I

5 am Sherice Sargent. Thank you all

6 elected officials of City Council, other

7 panelists and those attending virtually

8 throughout our City. I thank you for

9 this opportunity to welcome parent and

10 community engagement to this matter. I

11 am Sherice Sargent. While it states I

12 am an organizer for all parents for

13 equity, please note we are not a formal

14 organization versus parents with a

15 common goal to support a better process

16 for students of this District.

17   Today I testify as a proud

18 parent of a current 12th grader and 8th

19 grader at G.W. Carver High School of

20 Engineering and Science with a vested

21 interest in my children and their peers'

22 education. I've held trusted positions

23 in my school community as an officer of

24 the Carver E&S Home and School

25 Association and continue to do so as a

 1 committed volunteer.

 2   As the HSA President and

 3 Treasurer, I was nominated and elected

 4 by Carver E&S parents to represent them

 5 in many ways. I also supported other

 6 communities to promote parent advocacy

 7 and support. As the current HSA

 8 President, specifically I partnered with

 9 the Carver principal and teachers as a

10 trusted advisor to represent the parent

11 body during many forums, including

12 promoting the School District surveys,

13 school admission process inclusive of

14 tours, new family orientation and open

15 houses. I shared my experiences to

16 promote the school, welcomed parents

17 echoing the sentiments of the principal

18 and explained the current culture,

19 community and middle school transition

20 into high school at Carver E&S.

21   As the HSA President, I was

22 personally introduced to the School

23 Board President Wilkerson at our Blue

24 Ribbon ceremony on September 26, 2019

25 when she commended Carver for diversity,

1   equity, student success and strong

2   parent body. I was there when Board

3   President Wilkerson applauded Carver

4   which State Representative Bullock

5   referenced earlier today. I take great

6   pride as I represent Carver parents and

7   citizens of the City.

8   So I ask today why is Carver

9   undergoing this overhaul creating a

10 major risk to disrupt our community in

11 which you commended its achievement? If

12 you have known about the needed changes

13 to become more equitable and equal, why

14 institute this now after COVID, more

15 importantly, as this Administration's

16 term is ending.

17   This also leads me to question

18 other magnet schools that are already

19 diverse and/or have newly implemented

20 practices in place to increase diversity

21 with intentional and student-driven

22 plans with human judgment of our

23 talented administrators. Thank you,

24 Councilman Oh, for those demographics to

25 highlight the already in place diversity

 1   communities of the magnet schools.

 2   So when the parent notification

 3   regarding changes to the school

 4   selection application to criteria-based

 5   formerly known as special select schools

 6   occurred on October 6th at 1:49 p.m.,

 7   you can imagine my phone by 2:00 p.m. I

 8   had over 30 calls and texts just from

 9   Carver parents and other schools. I

10   instantaneously went to Carver to speak

11   with the principal as the outrage and

12   fear of Carver Middle School parents was

13   at a high.

14   As an invested parent, I wanted

15   to bring this matter to his attention.

16   I knew I had a small window because the

17   announcement occurred just three hours

18   shy of the application opening. I, like

19   many other current 7th and 8th grade

20   students, removed their current student

21   from their previous school which was K

22   through 8 for the full Carver experience

23   of Grades K through 12. This was never

24   presented as an incentive for student

25   success, as my child and her peers were

 1 successful prior to entering Carver,

 2 thus their admission.

 3   In addition, I reject the

 4 sentiment of parents acting in

 5 privilege, as my daughter's hard work

 6 where she continues to sustain as a high

 7 standard because I set the expectations

 8 at home in which the school as well.

 9 She along with Carver Middle School

10 students with the support of a great

11 teaching staff earned their achievements

12 and abilities to meet goals set forth.

13 Since this was a seven-year practice and

14 message from the principal, I never

15 questioned if it was a written policy.

16 It is not my role. My role as a parent

17 is to trust and support my school and

18 its leader, to have such trust in you,

19 the District, as a Philadelphia resident

20 and a taxpayer.

21   Philadelphia School District,

22 why did you allow such a practice to

23 occur without a policy for the last

24 seven to eight years? Where was your

25 oversight of the principal and other

1   school leadership? How do you sustain

2   the middle school such as Carver, SLA

3   Beeber and Hill-Freedman if you believe

4   parents arrived knowing that it was only

5   a two- or three-year commitment with no

6   choice to continue? You are now

7   enforcing a policy versus promoting

8   school choice.

9   Philadelphia School District, I

10 trusted your decision as you appointed

11 the principal to be the leader of over

12 900 students at Carver. I trusted the

13 principal so much that I repeated the

14 practice known as the Carver middle

15 school transition as a parent leader and

16 HSA President. The lack of oversight

17 places me in a compromising position as

18 I promoted a practice in which you now

19 say does not exist as a policy. What

20 should I trust and promote as a parent

21 and as a taxpayer in the City?

22   I do not trust the rushed

23 implementation as a stakeholder, as I

24 was excluded from knowing all the facts.

25 Parents and I were left to research and

1   organize to support our children. So

2   across the City all parents for equity

3   in education began as you abandoned us

4   in this process. In October, we

5   proposed many changes directly to you,

6   School District, to support the new

7   process with adjustments to the current

8   process to lessen the harm of middle

9   school children and other marginalized

10   students.

11   You declined without hearing a

12   full discussion and denied an

13   opportunity of a two-way engagement. As

14   a result, parents were left with no

15   choice but to ask our elected officials

16   to hear us because you did not. So

17   thank you again, Councilmembers Oh,

18   Squilla, Gilmore Richardson and my

19   Representative Cindy Bass for sponsoring

20   the resolution today.

21   When Dr. Hite announced the

22   school selection change, he provided the

23   reasoning of I quote, "this past year in

24   alignment with our commitment towards

25   anti-racism and equity as outlined in

1   the Board of Education's goals and

2   guardrails, the school selection process

3   underwent an initial equity review

4   during which we collected feedback from

5   various stakeholders, including parents

6   and families."

7   When you look at the four

8   guardrails, this process is not

9   reflective. Guardrail 1, welcoming and

10   supportive schools; Guardrail 2,

11   enriching and well-rounded school

12   experience; Guardrail 3, partnering with

13   parents and families; Guardrail 4,

14   addressing racist practices. While all

15   this seems like a true concept in

16   theory, what is written is not

17   practiced. And we've seen so many times

18   just this year of many changes inclusive

19   of the school selection process, the

20   change of the school schedule and school

21   bus issue.

22   So the changes in Policy 206,

23   assignment within a district, which

24   states the purpose is to promote the

25   best interests of children and utilize

 1   clear and transparent processes and

 2   procedures and create community whose

 3   members have a diverse background and

 4   life experiences that enhance equity,

 5   reflect the City's population does not

 6   seem apparent or transparent to me.

 7   Unfortunately, the recent

 8   efforts do not meet the intent and

 9   interests because there is an adverse

10   effect to Black and Brown children,

11   students with different learning styles

12   and students with English as a second

13   language. While I present my

14   disappointment in the recent decision of

15   the process, I want to state for the

16   record I am open to accept the

17   invitation to join any efforts to meet

18   the intended goals for all students in

19   Philadelphia.

20   For now I ask if the current

21   process continues, current middle

22   schools and magnet schools who meet the

23   criteria be excluded from the new

24   selection process as we were not given

25   an opportunity to truly vet other school

1 choices last year during COVID. Please

2 honor the practice in which I along with

3 many parents of Carver, SLA Beeber,

4 Hill-Freedman and Masterman enrolled our

5 children.

6   Number 2, if the writing

7 assessment remains, add an appeals

8 process for students to include other

9 data points as children are more than a

10 score. Also, to thoroughly review and

11 ensure all modifications and

12 accommodations for students with

13 different learning styles are reviewed

14 as set forth by their learning

15 environment and the applicable laws.

16   Number 3, remove all zip code

17 preference to welcome all families

18 across the City an opportunity to

19 receive a quality education. And number

20 4, most importantly fund all schools to

21 have equitable resources and close the

22 gap between magnet and catchment

23 schools. This will immediately impact

24 student achievement directly and

25 swiftly. Thank you for your time today.

1   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you

2   so much for your testimony, Sherice.

3   Next we'll have Tanya Folk. If

4   you're available after Tanya, Wallette,

5   be ready. Just state your name, Tanya,

6   and proceed with your testimony.

7   MS. FOLK: Okay. Good morning.

8   My name is Tanya Folk and I was born and

9   raised in Philadelphia. My husband and

10 I have five children. Our two oldest

11 graduated from Central. We have two

12 that are at Carver. One is in 8th and

13 one is in 10th, and we have a daughter

14 at Masterman in 5th grade.

15   While I understand the need for

16 change, I have serious concerns about

17 the new school selection process. I

18 remember participating in a School

19 District survey back in May or June.

20 And as I went through the questions, I

21 did not envision the current process as

22 the outcome. The survey on how to

23 improve the school selection process ran

24 between May 17th and June 11th. After

25 the survey closed, there was no

 1   engagement that I am aware of with

 2   parents and students to help develop the

 3   process.

 4   There was no indication that

 5   this survey would impact current 8th

 6   graders enrolled in middle schools

 7   attached to high schools. The School

 8   District added the written assessment

 9   even though it ranked 7th on its survey.

10   And they added a lottery system even

11   though it was rated last as an option

12   for improving the process. Some of

13   those responses included and I quote, "A

14   lottery is the worst idea I have ever

15   heard, this wouldn't ensure equity at

16   all." Another person said, A lottery

17   for school admission is a horrible idea.

18   Because transparency is really

19   important, as a parent how would I know

20   for sure that my child was entered into

21   all eligible lotteries. This is

22   important to know before the lottery is

23   conducted to give parents to a chance to

24   make sure no mistakes were made. We

25   need transparency.

 1   It's a challenges to support

 2 the lottery in its current form because

 3 it includes these 8th graders, which it

 4 should not. Families and students

 5 should not have to endure the

 6 uncertainty that a dual lottery brings.

 7 Also, many of these 8th graders did not

 8 research high schools in 7th grade

 9 because they planned to stay in their

10 schools for high school.

11   According to the School

12 District survey results, 53.3 percent of

13 students planned to stay in their

14 current school for the 2022-23 school

15 year. Some of those written responses

16 include and I quote, "My child is

17 already at a special admission school

18 and as far as I know, we don't need to

19 reapply." Another parent said, Already

20 at special admission school for 7th

21 grade. More than half plan to stay in

22 their current schools. This should have

23 given pause to creating a new process

24 that will result in removing schools

25 from these schools like Carver, Hill-

 1   Freedman and (inaudible).

 2   The School District added zip

 3   code priority, another new aspect of the

 4   process. If using a lottery system, why

 5   add zip code priority. You've removed

 6   the mismanagement of admissions that you

 7   stated was occurring at the school level

 8   by replacing principals with an

 9   electronic lottery system. Why are

10   these zip codes underrepresented in four

11   of the magnet schools? What are the

12   barriers? Are they being addressed?

13   Without addressing all barriers

14   and allocating the exact resources

15   needed by students, then a lottery even

16   with zip code priority will not get us

17   to equity. I hope we can get to an

18   equitable solution so that all students

19   and families can relax and enjoy the

20   upcoming holiday. So please, can you

21   exclude current 8th graders in this new

22   process for the schools in which they

23   are already students, then have the

24   remaining seats go to the lottery. If

25   you can't do that, please explain why.

1   Please do not give the written

2   assessment too much weight. According

3   to the District's own frequently asked

4   questions, the assessment is one data

5   point for consideration so it should not

6   be able to knock a student out of the

7   lottery because they missed by half a

8   point. And last, please add an appeals

9   process. Thank you.

10   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,

11   Tanya, for your testimony.

12   Next we have Wallette Carter.

13   After Wallette, we'll have Miriam Hill

14   and then Eric Santoro. Wallette, if you

15   just want to state your name for the

16   record and proceed with your testimony.

17   MS. CARTER: Good morning.

18   Wallette Carter. Good morning. My name

19   is Wallette Carter and I am a

20   grandparent of a student at SLA @

21   Beeber. Today I come before you not

22   only for our children at SLA @ Beeber,

23   but for all children in the School

24   District of Philadelphia. The last

25   couple of years has been a toll not only

 1   on our students and teachers, but on our

 2   families and communities. For the

 3   School District of Philadelphia to once

 4   again put a burden and a wrench in the

 5   system at this time is truly detrimental

 6   to us.

 7   But I would like to say SLA

 8   Beeber has not only gone through this

 9   problem this year, but it has also been

10   impacted by a construction problem for

11   the capital improvements. We as a

12   school have been taken out of our

13   schools. Our middle school is no longer

14   at SLA @ Beeber. We are now over at

15   Powell. The School District didn't

16   decide to do this until the day before

17   school started. So this is the second

18   year that our children are displaced,

19   and now you're trying to take our

20   children and put them into a school

21   where they don't have any family or

22   maybe have any friends because of a

23   lottery system, because of a reading

24   assessment.

25   All of our children are not

 1   able to get a 22 or a 17. Some of them

 2   got a 10 or a 5 because they are not in

 3   their place of environment. Now, how do

 4   we announce the day before this starts

 5   that it's going to change? I admit a

 6   lot of our children as previously stated

 7   were not looking at schools in 7th grade

 8   because they were in a pandemic, they

 9   are at home learning, but that shouldn't

10   have caused them not to be able to do

11   what they needed to do in 8th grade.

12   But I do understand that a lot of things

13   have changed within the School District.

14   I am starting to learn more

15   about very much in the School District

16   and I am starting to be a part of the

17   PCAC, which is the Parent Community

18   Advisory Council, which is attached to

19   the Board. I've also joined into the

20   Face Action Group so that I could become

21   more and more involved in schools within

22   the Philadelphia school system. If

23   those things are not there, then how can

24   we expect them to be educating our

25   children.

 1   In reference to the school

 2   selection program -- I'm sorry, I'm

 3   going back again -- how do you start

 4   something that was not completed. I

 5   understand that at this point it is not

 6   completed. No, no type of advisory --

 7   not advisory, no type of -- oh, I just

 8   lost my thought, please forgive me. No

 9   type of appeal process, thank you,

10   appeal process is in place for this and

11   that is very disgusting.

12   We talked to at the School

13   Board when I was listening this last

14   Thursday there was a parent that said if

15   a child got a 22.1 -- sorry, a 21.9 were

16   they going to be left out. Ms. Lynch

17   politely said without flinching yes.

18   They haven't even thought of an appeal

19   process for this school selection. This

20   is not fair. How do we decide to give

21   part of the program and not the complete

22   program from the beginning. How do we

23   say that this is what the community

24   wants.

25   Yes, you did a survey of about

 1   out of 120,000 families. You only got

 2   5,000 responses. Responses that don't

 3   even talk about a lottery as previously

 4   stated. Yes, I am saying the system

 5   needs to be changed. Yes, there is bias

 6   and prejudice and there's a picking and

 7   choosing. And, yes, this is not fair

 8   either. But what we are doing is not

 9   fair, so two wrongs don't definitely

10   make a right. It's time for you to stop

11   this system of school selection as it

12   was in the past and as you have

13   presented it now.

14   No, I believe in special school

15   selections and some schools offer

16   different learning techniques that some

17   schools don't, but your K through 8

18   needs to be equal so that all of the

19   school selection process that has an

20   existence will be open to every child in

21   the School District of Philadelphia no

22   matter where they are, no matter who

23   they are, no matter what they are and no

24   matter where they live.

25   For you to fix the School

1 District, not just one part, not just

2 one section, but the whole thing stops,

3 trying to build a house from the top

4 down. That foundation for every child

5 should be in every Philadelphia school.

6 And when you lay that foundation and

7 build a strong first floor, second

8 floor, third floor, all the way up to

9 the 12th floor, then you will have the

10 best school district in Philadelphia,

11 which is equitably equal, diversity and

12 community-minded.

13   I have stated this for me

14 (inaudible) to be in the action group,

15 and I hope that you as City Council will

16 definitely look into doing whatever is

17 possible to help our children become the

18 exceptional children that each and every

19 one of them had the opportunity to be.

20 Thank you.

21   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,

22 Wallette. Thank you for your testimony.

23   Miriam Hill. And then after

24 Miriam, we'll have Eric Santoro and then

25 we'll have Solomon Jones. Miriam, just

1 state your name for the record and then

2 proceed with your testimony today.

3   MS. HILL: Yes. Thank you.

4 I'd like to thank Council for listening

5 to all of us today. My name is Miriam

6 Hill and I'm the proud parent of an 8th

7 grader at Carver Engineering and

8 Science. I understand the deep need for

9 equity in this District and I see that

10 change is necessary, and I even think a

11 lottery might be a good idea. I think

12 the District's intentions were good, but

13 I'm here today because the District

14 failed to think out the details and has

15 created a process that will harm some

16 kids.

17   I have three requests: Please

18 be fair to the 8th graders at Carver,

19 SLA Beeber, Masterman and other schools

20 that have a middle school with an

21 associated high school. At Carver, we

22 have 60 8th graders and about 200 high

23 school seats. This is such a small

24 number of kids. I can't understand why

25 the District won't even listen to us or

 1   talk to us in a real way about this

 2   question.

 3   As others have said when our

 4   kids applied to Carver, the principal

 5   told us that if our kids got A's and B's

 6   in 7th and 8th, they would get strong

 7   preference to admission to Carver High

 8   School. We knew we had to reapply, but

 9   it was something close to a promise from

10   the principals if our kids did the work,

11   and this was not a perception. We have

12   video that I've shared with some of you

13   of the Carver principals explaining the

14   school exactly this way.

15   Now, the District is saying

16   that because there was no written

17   policy, they don't have to honor what

18   the principals, the District employees

19   said. Are parents expected to ask for a

20   written policy every time a principal

21   gives us information? Our kids worked

22   hard based on what principals told them.

23   Now, the District is saying never mind,

24   and they hit our kids with this when

25   they were finally back in school after a

 1   pandemic year starting to make friends

 2   and getting an inperson instruction.

 3   Things were starting to seem normal and

 4   then this came, which by the way was

 5   announced by robocall.

 6   So my first request is that you

 7   find a way to honor the commitment made

 8   to the middle schoolers. We believe

 9   there are simple solutions, because most

10   of these schools have room for current

11   8th graders, hundreds of children from

12   the lottery. My second request is that

13   the District start communicating with

14   parents, teachers and staff in a fair

15   and a human way. This District's

16   top-down approach has hidden deadly

17   asbestos and environmental problems and

18   have thrown parents and kids into

19   disarray with its random announcements.

20   The District claims there was a

21   public process about the lottery. If

22   their communications were effective, why

23   were so many parents completely

24   surprised by this change. Please take

25   the opportunity that comes with a new

1 superintendent to create a system of

2 open, transparent communication. One

3 with lots of room for discussion and

4 time for parents to plan for changes.

5   Honestly, if you had given me a

6 year to deal with this, maybe I wouldn't

7 have been so angry and dismayed. But as

8 many have noted, they gave us a few

9 weeks to visit schools, think about

10 private schools. Some of us are

11 thinking about moving to the suburbs,

12 and it was just shocking to me that they

13 would do this, and we all have jobs.

14   My final request is that we all

15 work together to create excellent

16 schools throughout the City. The

17 District says our kids can go to

18 neighborhood schools. And as a person

19 of some racial and economic privilege, I

20 really had to ask myself am I right to

21 fight this fight. And I keep coming

22 back to a moment I had with my fellow

23 Carver parents on a Zoom call when one

24 by one the parents said some version of

25 I can't send my child to Roxborough, I

 1   can't send my child to Strawberry

 2   Mansion, I can't send my child to

 3   Lincoln. This is the root problem and

 4   we want to work with you to create more

 5   excellent high schools to fight for fair

 6   funding and other much-needed changes,

 7   but we need your help. We need a

 8   District that sees us as partners, not

 9   as problems. Thank you very much.

10   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,

11   Miriam, for your testimony.

12   Next we have Eric. If you just

13   want to just state your name for the

14   record and then proceed, and then we'll

15   go on to Solomon Jones.

16   COUNCILMAN OH: Chair, I'm

17   sorry for interrupting. I'd just like

18   to note, Ms. Wallette, you have not

19   muted your microphone, if you can do

20   that. We don't want to hear any private

21   conversations you may have. If everyone

22   could double check your microphones,

23   make sure they're muted. Thank you very

24   much.

25   MR. SANTORO: Okay. Members of

 1 Council, good morning. My name is Eric

 2 Santoro and I'm the proud parent of

 3 three Masterman students. Many of the

 4 problems with the school selection

 5 process have already been outlined in a

 6 petition signed by more than 1500 people

 7 that was already sent to City Council so

 8 I won't repeat all of them. But really,

 9 all of issues stem from one overarching

10 fundamental flaw. The District ramroded

11 through the changes at the very last

12 minute without meaningful engagement or

13 feedback from students or parents, and

14 we've heard about that today.

15   But to give you just one

16 example, at several School Board

17 meetings many parents, including myself,

18 spoke up and warned the writing

19 requirement was poorly designed and

20 callously implemented to inevitably

21 cause mental distress and humiliation.

22 As you heard this morning from a pile of

23 experts, these concerns unfortunately

24 proved accurate. All the predicted

25 problems actually occurred, and this

1   could have been avoided had the District

2   merely engaged in parents before making

3   changes.

4   This is a city that understands

5   the need for public feedback. For the

6   redesign of the Ben Franklin Parkway,

7   extensive time is set aside for meetings

8   with the public, meeting with the public

9   to engage prior to starting. And if we

10 could seek public feedback for a

11 landscaping project, we surely could do

12 the same for a policy that will

13 dramatically alter educational

14 opportunities for thousands of students.

15   8th graders attending city-wide

16 middle schools left the comfort of their

17 neighborhoods to study rigorous

18 education curricula with an

19 understanding that if they show up every

20 day, work really hard and do well, they

21 would almost certainly be admitted into

22 their corresponding high school. For

23 the District can now pretend otherwise

24 is really just patronizing to us.

25   Some 10- to 14-year-olds travel

1   more than 90 minutes each way on public

2   transit. Now, we're telling them that

3   none of it mattered. Whether they stay

4   is just up to a lottery. What kind of

5   lessons are we sending these students.

6   Moreover, other schools like CAPA, GAMP

7   and Carver cater to particular skills

8   and interests. Lotteries that admits

9   students by chance will inevitably

10 undermine these schools' unique

11 missions.

12   The justification for the

13 changes from everything I've heard prior

14 to today and everything I've heard this

15 morning seems to be Masterman, that

16 supposedly lacks diversity and is

17 "bastions of privilege." I admittedly

18 have not studied this, but my children's

19 experience has not been consistent with

20 this narrative. I've taken my children

21 all over the City to visit Masterman

22 Friends who come from a wide variety of

23 racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds.

24 They also have friends whose families

25 come from all parts of the world,

 1 including the Caribbean, Latin America,

 2 Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe,

 3 South and East Asia and several others.

 4   And I understand in last year's

 5 entering class, the percentage of Black

 6 students tripled compared to the prior

 7 year. That alone should give pause to

 8 anyone advocating for lotteries. This

 9 cultural diversity is one of the reasons

10 my family values Masterman. It is

11 indeed ironic that to improve the

12 diversity at Masterman, the District is

13 employing a writing statement that is

14 really just an English language

15 proficiency test, which unequivocally

16 discriminates against non-English

17 language -- unequivocally discriminates

18 against English language learners. The

19 demographics of Philadelphia are

20 changing and we risk inadvertently

21 replacing perceived racism with

22 nativism.

23   I urge a pause to all the new

24 changes to the school selection process

25 and instead urge the District to

 1 actually engage with the families who

 2 are being impacted in a thoughtful

 3 collaboration to better design a

 4 selection process that will both promote

 5 equity and better meet the needs of the

 6 impacted students. I thank you all for

 7 your time and consideration.

 8   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,

 9 Eric, for your testimony.

10   Solomon Jones, if you're

11 available. And then after that, we'll

12 go to Neha Vapiwala. Solomon, please

13 state your name for the record and

14 proceed.

15   MR. JONES: My name is Solomon

16 Jones. I'm a lifelong Philadelphian,

17 radio host, columnist and leader in our

18 community. I want to share something

19 with you that was told to me as we did a

20 study on gun violence. A 26-year-old

21 young man said this: "We all go to one

22 school because we C grade or below, so

23 we got to go to that school and be

24 around the kids that don't want to learn

25 nothing. So they put us in that setting

1   and it's like give up. That's basically

2   what it is. The solution is just stop

3   with that. They need to get rid of

4   feeder schools, period. I'm talking

5   about from 9th grade. When I found out

6   what it was, oh, this is a feeder

7   school. This is what we got to go to

8   because we didn't get our right grades,

9   but I'm like, oh, I applied for Central,

10   I applied for School of the Future, I

11   applied to Saul, yo, can y'all give me

12   some help so I can get into one of

13   these. So basically it's like you guys

14   want me to turn into a monster because

15   you're putting me around with other

16   monsters, so I had no option to become

17   that too to protect myself."

18   These are the words of a

19   26-year-old man from North Philly whose

20   life was impacted by gun violence. His

21   brother's arm was shattered by gunfire.

22   His cousin was murdered just days after

23   he made this statement. He was someone

24   who experienced gun violence for

25   himself, but the gun violence started

 1   long before anybody pulled the trigger.

 2   It started in neighborhood schools that

 3   were underresourced and underfunded. It

 4   started with schools where his hunger

 5   for knowledge was swallowed up in

 6   classrooms where learning was

 7   impossible, starting where he had no

 8   opportunity to get into the magnet

 9   schools he longed to attend.

10   Like so many of our Black

11   children, he was fed into a system that

12   churns out far too much hopelessness,

13   fed into a system that churns out far

14   too much apathy, fed into a system that

15   forces too many of our kids to choose

16   between becoming monsters or becoming

17   victims. That's the reality of our

18   children in our most challenged

19   communities, and that can't be their

20   only option.

21   Our magnet schools are a

22   shining light within this beleaguered

23   school system. They're places that

24   provide children the opportunity to rise

25   above economics, to rise above social

 1   ills, to rise above broken families, to

 2   rise above expectations. I know this

 3   because I attended Masterman Middle

 4   School. And even after my parents

 5   divorced and our economic situation

 6   changed and our family structure changed

 7   and our reality changed, Solomon Jones,

 8   this child of a single mother from North

 9   Philly, had the opportunity to go to

10   school with the children of newspaper

11   editors and doctors and lawyers and

12   business owners and mayors. I learned

13   Latin with Dr. DiPace and History with

14   Mrs. Waters and Impressionist Art with

15   Mrs. Linder.

16   I learned that there was a

17   world beyond 25th and Oxford, a place

18   that was at the time challenged by

19   poverty, but where the neighbors loved

20   each other and shared what little we

21   had. That education became the

22   foundation for who and what I would

23   later become. So even when the drugs

24   that had decimated my community overtook

25   me and left me homeless, I could lean on

 1   the education I had received at

 2   Masterman, knowing they could never take

 3   that away from me. That education,

 4   that's why I survived poverty. It's why

 5   I survived homelessness. It's why I

 6   survived the streets, and it's why I can

 7   now be a voice for my community.

 8   But now the School District is

 9   breaking the promise of magnet schools

10   by reneging of the promises made to

11   parents of those who attended these

12   middle schools. At Carver Engineering

13   and Science where my son is now a

14   senior, parents were told that their

15   middle school students could attend the

16   high school if their grades and behavior

17   were good. There are other magnet

18   middle schools where the same promises

19   were made and now those promises are

20   being broken. Not only that, the School

21   District have selected zip codes that

22   are rapidly gentrifying and giving them

23   priority when it comes to attending

24   magnet schools. Why should students in

25   now what is called Brewerytown get

1   priority where there are houses in that

2   community that sell for $400,000.

3   That's a setup. Because if that

4   community continue to gentrify, Black

5   communities will disappear and Black

6   children will have yet another barrier

7   to receiving the highest quality

8   education that our City has to offer.

9   And as a professional writer,

10   I'm offended that a writing test judged

11   by a computer will be used as an

12   admissions tool for these schools, not

13   only because our community schools don't

14   prepare our children to be good writers,

15   they don't, but because writing is the

16   one discipline that can never be judged

17   by a computer. Good writing touches the

18   heart. It finds a thing that makes us

19   human and gives it life. It speaks to

20   us in quiet places that can't be judged

21   by a machine.

22   I'm testifying today not just

23   for the students who currently attend

24   our magnet schools, but for the ones who

25   could not attend and was swallowed up by

 1 the criminal justice. I testify for the

 2 ones who could not attend and were

 3 trapped in a cycle of poverty. I

 4 testify for the ones who could not

 5 attend and lost their lives to gunfire.

 6   Education in America has always

 7 been a tool that's been used to keep

 8 Black children from competing on equal

 9 footing. It's why we had to fight

10 through Brown vs. Education. But even

11 then, schools were not desegregated. I

12 know because right here in Philly it

13 wasn't until 2009 that the School Reform

14 Commission voted to end 40 years of

15 desegregation litigation and committed

16 to implementing a plan that would

17 improve achievement in the District's

18 racially isolated schools. That

19 improved achievement is still not a

20 reality. But in our magnet schools, our

21 kid have a fighting chance.

22   So let me be blunt. I believe

23 the School District's changes to the

24 magnet school admission process will set

25 up generations of Black children to be

1   left out of these schools at even

2   greater numbers, so this is more than a

3   matter of education. It's a matter of

4   economics. It's a matter of racial

5   justice. It's a matter of life and

6   death. Our children are dying.

7   And so, this is what I am

8   demanding and this is what I'll be

9   taking to our community: One, no

10 changes to the magnet school admissions

11 process should be made until a new

12 superintendent is appointed. Two,

13 children who currently attend magnet

14 middle schools should be allowed to stay

15 and attend high schools as they were

16 promised. Three, a computerized writing

17 test should not be used to determine

18 admittance to magnet schools. And four,

19 the current list of preferred zip codes

20 should be thoroughly reviewed before

21 they are implemented. We will not stop

22 advocating for our children. So dig in

23 and get ready for a fight. Thank you

24 for allowing me to testify this morning.

25   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,

 1   Solomon, for your testimony.

 2   Doctor, if you want to proceed.

 3   And then after Doctor, we have

 4   Archbishop Mary Floyd Palmer.

 5   DR. VAPIWALA: Thank you. And

 6   I want to start by thanking all of the

 7   panelists who have spoken this far for

 8   sharing your truth. And I want to thank

 9   all of the City Councilmembers for your

10   tireless individual and collective

11   dedication to our City and for this

12   opportunity today to discuss the school

13   selection process so we can reinforce

14   our shared goals of promoting diversity,

15   equity and inclusion within our schools

16   and throughout our community.

17   I'm here today representing my

18   personal perspectives as a longtime

19   resident of Philadelphia, as a

20   practicing physician, as a medical

21   school educator and administrator and a

22   mother of a 5th and 6th grader in the

23   magnet school system. I work in the

24   City as a cancer doctor. But in

25   addition to caring for patients, I

1   conduct research to help identify and

2   reduce existing health care disparities,

3   impacting Black and Latino men in

4   Philadelphia. I publish extensively on

5   the lack of diversity in our national

6   scientific and medical workforces, and I

7   have the tremendous honor of recruiting

8   and teaching students and junior doctors

9   who hail from incredibly diverse

10 backgrounds.

11   And I just want to explain that

12 I'm an immigrant, I'm also an immigrant

13 who grew up in an impoverished village

14 in India. My father arrived to this

15 country with $70 and zero professional

16 training. He worked at a gas station

17 for several years before saving up

18 enough funds to sponsor my grandmother,

19 mother and me so we could make the

20 arduous journey and embark upon this

21 proverbial American dream. And for

22 years we lived in a cramped one-bedroom

23 apartment that was infested with

24 rodents, but filled with gratitude for

25 the present and hope for the future.

1   And for even more years, my

2   parents were and continue to be subject

3   to countless racial epithets, and I was

4   teased mercilessly at school, ostracized

5   for my accent, my broken English, my

6   skin color, my strange name. But beyond

7   my family, it was my public

8   schoolteachers and my public school

9   education that made the greatest

10   impression on me.

11   It was my public schoolteachers

12   who reminded me why we risked so much to

13   start a brand new life in the United

14   States. It was they who reassured me

15   that despite my differences and the

16   prejudice that these differences

17   provoked that I did, in fact, belong

18   there, and it was my public

19   schoolteachers who instilled in me the

20   realization that education is the

21   foundation upon which all opportunities

22   are built, upon which the cycle of

23   poverty is broken and upon which our

24   children's dreams are realized.

25   Here in Philadelphia there are

 1   countless families no matter their race

 2   or ethnicity or zip code who do not have

 3   the financial means to consider private

 4   schools or other options. Magnet

 5   schools are one beacon of hope and they

 6   can offer a life-changing path for so

 7   many of our kids. I'm empathetic with

 8   and stand in support of all the families

 9   who are immediately impacted by the

10   recently introduced high school student

11   selection process.

12   I'm not part of that immediate

13   impact, but I feel for what they are

14   going through. And I implore

15   Councilmembers to listen to these

16   parents and students, to hear their

17   anguish and to promptly address their

18   concerns regarding the educational

19   opportunities that they fear have been

20   destroyed as a result.

21   I also fully appreciate

22   firsthand from my own role in overseeing

23   admissions for a large prestigious

24   medical school and my professional

25   commitment to increase our population of

 1 public students from historically

 2 underrepresented backgrounds, something

 3 that I consider my passion.

 4   I truly appreciate that student

 5 selection is an incredibly complex and

 6 complicated process. Using zip codes as

 7 a proxy for diversity is inherently

 8 specious and it risks the opposite of

 9 the intended outcome, as you've already

10 heard from so many folks earlier today.

11 Lottery-based admissions will absolutely

12 overlook some of our most talented and

13 capable youth from all corners of the

14 City. So I also stand ready to support

15 the necessary work to accomplish the

16 Board of Education and School District's

17 daunting task of ensuring a fair and

18 more equitable process for high school

19 admission.

20   There are several critical

21 evidence-based approaches that we can

22 undertake and that would improve access

23 for many of our deserving, but currently

24 underrepresented students. For example,

25 the selection process can include

1   weighted factors to acknowledge and

2   account for a student's resources or

3   lack therein, for a student's hardships

4   or lack therein and recognize and value

5   the importance of character and

6   integrity and potential that may not and

7   frankly are not reflected in traditional

8   measures. And this holistic approach

9   can achieve equity without dashing the

10 hopes of deserving students who just

11 happen to reside in the wrong zip code

12 that particular year or they strike out

13 in the lottery.

14   These kind of multi-factorial

15 admission approaches, they require time,

16 they require resources, thoughtful

17 discourse and frankly sensitivity

18 towards all affected from all

19 backgrounds. So today's hearing is

20 about ensuring that we do not compromise

21 educational opportunities for current

22 8th graders not this year, not ever.

23 But beyond today, we need significant

24 investment in all of our neighborhood

25 schools. We need validated research.

 1   We need expansion of seats in criteria-

 2   based schools, and we need institution

 3   of meaningful metrics to demonstrate

 4   meaningful gains in equity, not token

 5   gains while we maintain, if not,

 6   enhanced the standards and quality of

 7   our children's educational experience.

 8   So right now we ask for

 9   emerging action from the leadership of

10   this City to address the myriad issues

11   that have been raised today. But real

12   and durable solutions will require

13   Councilmembers to commit to ongoing

14   prioritization of all of our schools,

15   broad stakeholder engagement, inclusion

16   of relevant counsel from experts who are

17   ready and willing to collaborate with

18   the School District and Board of

19   Education to give of our time and our

20   expertise, and it's only through this

21   longitudinal commitment that we can

22   elevate education to the platform it

23   deserves, that we can implement fair and

24   holistic school and student selection

25   approaches, and that we can realize our

1 shared imperative to increase diversity,

2 equity, inclusion and opportunity to a

3 high quality public school education for

4 all Philadelphians. And I want to thank

5 you for this opportunity to share those

6 thoughts today.

7   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you.

8 Doctor, for your testimony. Much

9 appreciated.

10   I know we have Archbishop Mary

11 Floyd Palmer. Are you available to

12 testify? Please state your name for the

13 record and proceed.

14   ARCHBISHOP FLOYD PALMER: Yes.

15 Archbishop Mary Floyd Palmer. Can you

16 hear me?

17   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes.

18 Please proceed.

19   ARCHBISHOP FLOYD PALMER: Okay.

20 Oh, good afternoon to Chairperson

21 Sanchez, to Chairman Representative

22 Squilla, to esteemed Committee members,

23 prestigious panelists, other elected

24 officials, the community at large and

25 the City of Philadelphia, concerned

 1   parents and most importantly, our

 2   impacted students along with our School

 3   District representatives.

 4   I am Archbishop Mary Floyd

 5   Palmer and I am First Archbishop in the

 6   City of Philadelphia and the state of

 7   Pennsylvania where I serve also as

 8   President and presiding Bishop of the

 9   Philadelphia Council Clergy as a

10   community activist and radio show host,

11   but more importantly, I'm a lifelong

12   citizen of this City.

13   I am also the parent of five

14   adult children. Four of which all

15   graduated from the School District of

16   Philadelphia. I'm the grandmother of

17   seven, where all presently attend public

18   school systems except for one. Six of

19   seven, Central High, TECH Freire, Fitler

20   Academics and private day care, and a

21   great grandmom of an almost 1-year-old

22   grandson who also will be coming through

23   this august educational system, which I

24   am most proud.

25   I am also a graduate of the

 1   Philadelphia High School for Girls,

 2   class of 1980, and one who was proud to

 3   attend a school where such diversity

 4   allowed me the opportunity to get an

 5   excellent education. This was guided

 6   through me and was pivotable in my

 7   career no matter what station in life.

 8   As Mr. Jones said, it helped me in bad

 9   parts of my life when things were not so

10   great, but it was my education that

11   carried me and afforded me the

12   opportunity to seek employment and to be

13   stellar at whatever assignment I had.

14   As a faith leader, I have

15   listened intently to more than a few

16   parents who shared with me their

17   condition and their august to this

18   current situation. My role is to listen

19   and to provide comfort and support to

20   them. I have watched them as they

21   cried, as they shed tears, fearful for

22   what this will do to their children,

23   their question, their word and their

24   supports felt subject to being

25   scrutinized.

 1   How do you respond to a child

 2   who says, Mom, Dad, why are we changing?

 3   Why can't I go back and be with my

 4   friends? Why is that happening now?

 5   How can anyone stand there and see tears

 6   on any child's face and not be impacted.

 7   I do not believe that anyone on this

 8   panel is against improvement against

 9   equity or equality. I believe that the

10   wholehearted opportunity is for all of

11   us to be able to get the best education.

12   This of course is pivotable upon five

13   schools or more where there is a process

14   that has been implemented. But more

15   importantly, this is not just about

16   these children now because it is

17   highlighted, but it's about all children

18   as previously has been said having the

19   same opportunities of education across

20   all sectors and sections of our City.

21   I've lived in Philadelphia all

22   of my life. I was afforded an

23   opportunity. When I wanted to apply to

24   the Philadelphia High School for Girls,

25   coming from a private education I was

 1   told what the process was two years in

 2   advance. I was not only given

 3   assistance, but support, study helps, if

 4   needed, for me to be able to take an

 5   entrance exam to attend this particular

 6   school. It was a selection process, but

 7   I was readily prepared and my parents

 8   expected me to do the best that I could,

 9   and thankfully I did well.

10   To change an opportunity for

11   children after a promise has been made

12   would make any parent or any leader

13   subject to wondering can they be

14   trusted. Transparency is necessary when

15   it comes to us as leaders, whether we

16   are parents, community activists,

17   politicians, elected officials or even

18   if we run a company. It is the duty of

19   those of us in leadership to be

20   transparent and honest with all who we

21   oversee.

22   It is important for us as

23   parents to be able to tell our children

24   that honesty is the best policy and to

25   make and ensure an environment with

1   transparency is key. There is nothing

2   in life that can do any alteration that

3   we can always predict the outcome.

4   However, we do have a voice that can

5   help to transform. Part of this

6   transformation is being able to be

7   informed, involved and then come to the

8   right solution at the right time.

9   I would venture to say from the

10 number of people that have reached out

11 to me both publicly and/or privately

12 either through the radio show or even

13 inboxing me, that there is a great

14 concern that at this time is a concern.

15 Should we be throwing our children into

16 additional trauma after coming from a

17 pandemic. How many of us even as adults

18 have adapted to a new and involved or

19 reviewed or reformed way of life due to

20 the pandemic? How are we okay? Many of

21 us are not, but we are existing because

22 there was a need to. And for us to now

23 put this burden on our children when

24 they yearn to be back in a social

25 environment that only help in their

 1 educational achievements and then to

 2 say, sorry, we don't have a process or,

 3 sorry, this process is now or, sorry,

 4 you don't have a voice or even worse

 5 than that, if you don't like it, go

 6 somewhere else. Is this how we handle

 7 adult situations? Is this a democracy?

 8 Is this what we are about?

 9   I am a proud parent, a proud

10 grandparent and I have always taught my

11 children that if there is something that

12 is not right, to speak up. I'm speaking

13 not only as a leader and a community

14 activist, but I'm also speaking as one

15 of who have gone through the public

16 school system and years later expect my

17 children to be proud of the same process

18 that their parents and I and other

19 taxpayers are paying for.

20   I believe the School District

21 of Philadelphia has good intentions. I

22 want to believe that they are advocating

23 what is best for our children. But when

24 a process brings more harm than good, it

25 is time to revisit it, it is time to

1 look at it and it is time to carefully

2 and thoughtfully figure out is this the

3 best time.

4   At the end of the day, it is my

5 hope that we as leaders who are supposed

6 to be exhibiting ethics and morals and

7 protecting the gentle minds of our

8 children will help us be honorable

9 people before them. This pandemic has

10 isolated us as humans, and many of us

11 suffer trauma, trauma in not being able

12 to grieve the way we used to, trauma in

13 not being able to speak and being

14 isolated.

15   Now, we are deemed back to a

16 time where we can enjoy one another's

17 presence. How can we ensure that safety

18 and security of our precious children's

19 minds and prevent additional trauma that

20 emotionally can cause many of them to

21 shut down, no desire to learn and end up

22 becoming the worst part of our society.

23 Is failure our ultimate goal or are we

24 as adults supposed to do everything we

25 can to keep our word.

 1   I do not believe that

 2   improvement is an issue. I do not

 3   believe that a process is an issue.

 4   Transparency is. Open communication is.

 5   And at the end of the day, is it best

 6   for our most precious commodity that

 7   anyone on this panel may have and, that

 8   is, our children. I don't know if you

 9   can agree with anything that would bring

10   more harm than good to them. As for me,

11   I certainly cannot. And I hope that

12   from the passion that I am speaking as a

13   mother, as a grandmother, as a proud

14   great grandma that I will be able to

15   embrace a school system that cares

16   passionately about them as I do. I

17   thank you for this opportunity to speak

18   to you and I hope that transparency will

19   strengthen the trust that we want to

20   have in a working relationship with all

21   involved. Thank you and may God bless

22   you.

23   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,

24   Archbishop, for your testimony. Much

25   appreciated.

 1   Next we have Sharen Finzimer

 2   and then Dr. Helene Furjan and then

 3   Michael Zhang. Sharen, would you like

 4   to state your name for the record and

 5   then proceed.

 6   MS. FINZIMER: (Muted).

 7   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: You're

 8   muted, Sharen.

 9   MS. FINZIMER: Okay. My name

10   is Sharen Finzimer. Can you hear me?

11   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes.

12   MS. FINZIMER: Okay. Good

13   afternoon, Councilmembers and guest

14   speakers. Thank you for the opportunity

15   to speak today from a principal

16   perspective. My name is Sharen

17   Finzimer. I'm a retired principal of

18   the Franklin Spencer Edmonds School in

19   the Philadelphia School District where I

20   served as principal from 2002 to 2015.

21   Prior to that, I was the principal of

22   the Julia Ward Howe School from 1995

23   through 2002.

24   I appreciate the opportunity to

25   appear before Council today and offer my

 1   views regarding the magnet schools'

 2   selection process in Philadelphia.

 3   During my 20 years as principal, every

 4   year many of my students would apply to

 5   the District magnet schools. It's a

 6   stressful process for the applicants and

 7   the School District must take that into

 8   account when altering a selection

 9   process. Changing the process without a

10   pilot program for eval before making

11   significant adjustments, it's not fair

12   to the students who are then

13   anticipating and preparing for a

14   different process.

15   I'm expressing my support for

16   the concerns of many that came forward

17   to object to the current changes

18   proposed by the School District in the

19   selection process. I'll address some of

20   the reasons quickly: Computer-graded

21   writing sample has many problems as

22   we've heard all morning for a variety of

23   reasons. Those who design such programs

24   advise against using these programs for

25   grading purposes. It's a program used

 1   to improve student writing ability, not

 2   to grade writing ability. Introducing a

 3   program and then to utilize the results

 4   as part of the selection process is

 5   unduly stressful and not fair to the

 6   student applicants.

 7   I'm also a principal that

 8   represented learning support students,

 9   emotional support students and autistic

10   support students, so I know firsthand

11   what Kim Caputo addressed in reference

12   to 504 accommodations and accommodations

13   for our special needs students.

14   Deleting the results of standardized

15   test scores takes away a significant way

16   to level the playing field among

17   applicants and identify students with

18   significant potential.

19   These tests measure where the

20   students are on their educational

21   development against their peers and

22   against the curriculum standards.

23   Eliminating standardized test scores as

24   one of the eval components removes an

25   important tool to compare applicants.

1 Since the change process was not

2 transparent and there was no pilot

3 program to eval for admission,

4 apparently applicant zip code will be

5 used as an input for the evaluation

6 process. The weight of zip code will

7 also be used as an input for the

8 intended consequence of eliminating

9 those the new process seeks to help.

10   The curriculum in the five

11 schools impacted is very demanding and

12 it's important to admit those schools

13 who have the best chance to succeed.

14 The zip code where a student lives is

15 not a valid predictor of future academic

16 performance. Test scores are at least a

17 valid predictor. The impact of

18 eliminating scores and adding zip codes

19 need to be carefully evaluated and

20 explained. Bottom line as a principal

21 in the Philadelphia School District, I

22 was always very careful to make it my

23 priority to engage all family and

24 community stakeholders in the decision-

25 making process regarding our

1   Philadelphia students. The fact that

2   the new selection process did not

3   include public commented or involvement

4   is contrary to what the School District

5   represents.

6   I strongly recommend the School

7   District pause the proposed changes to

8   the selection process. More work needs

9   to be done. A leadership team needs to

10   be put in place that includes family and

11   community engagement. The top

12   educational resources in Philadelphia

13   need to be effectively used to let our

14   best and brightest excel. The new

15   admission criteria and overall policy

16   that governs the magnet school selection

17   process must come forth from a

18   collaborative and identification of

19   those creators who are accountable for

20   impactful policy change. Many such

21   (inaudible) insignificant change with

22   little or no transparency is not good

23   public policy. Thank you. It's

24   wonderful meeting you all and

25   participating in today's hearing. Thank

 1   you.

 2   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you.

 3   Thank you for your testimony, Sharen.

 4   Dr. Helene, if you want to

 5   state your name for the record and then

 6   proceed with your testimony.

 7   DR. FURJAN: Hello. Thank you

 8   for listening to me. My name for the

 9   record is Dr. Helene Furjan and I am an

10   adjunct professor at Drexel where I

11   specialize in community-based learning

12   and social, racial and economic justice

13   work. And like everybody who have

14   spoken today, we absolutely agree with

15   the comments that Dr. Jubilee made about

16   improving equity and equality and

17   understanding that those two terms are

18   not the same. But I do want to say like

19   most people have spoken today I have

20   grave concerns about the process.

21   Now, I know that we're running

22   late and I want to keep my comments very

23   brief. So what I'm going to do today is

24   just give you some background

25   information on the student experiences,

1   all of the writing tests as it's played

2   out across the School District. And as

3   we heard from Dr. Joshua Wright, that

4   process is deeply flawed. And I think

5   fatally flawed to the point where it has

6   to be removed from the evaluations.

7   What we have seen and given

8   Dr. Wright's testimony, we understand

9   why we've seen what we've seen, is that

10   rather than the schools on those tests

11   roughly reflecting benchmarks and GPAs

12   as you would expect, that they, in fact,

13   haven't. And what we have seen in many,

14   many instances across the school and

15   including my child's own school is that

16   the highest grades have actually gone to

17   the lowest performing writers in the

18   school based on those benchmarks and GPA

19   as well as students who are extremely

20   gifted writers have scored low and in

21   numerous cases have actually scored

22   below 22. And these are students with

23   GPAs of close to 100, consistently over

24   numerous years. That I think is in part

25   by the fact that content was not

1   evaluated in that. And these are

2   students who excel at producing content

3   and argument, so who are creative

4   writers, who are thoughtful writers and

5   whose emphasis would have been on the

6   production of content. That that's not

7   evaluated is effectively flawed, right.

8   Part of the education that they

9   receive in writing is content-based.

10 It's not just about the bare-bones of

11 grammar and structure. The prompts also

12 tended to prioritize content and

13 (inaudible), and that means that's what

14 students will have pushed their

15 attention to. I also want to point out

16 that what we observed is that those

17 prompts were massively inconsistent.

18   So there prompts that said

19 things like choose a super power, define

20 success, why is your school great,

21 right, up against prompts that said

22 things like how could your school

23 incorporate community service into its

24 curriculum, discuss the ban on phone use

25 while driving, athletes need Cs to play.

 1   These are prompts that are not available

 2   to the experience or knowledge of a

 3   middle schooler and certainly not to all

 4   middle schoolers as they have to be in

 5   order for them to be fair.

 6   I know of a number of instances

 7   of students essentially balking at the

 8   prompt they were given and not knowing

 9   how to address it, not knowing how to

10   write an answer and that impacted those

11   students. Furthermore, prompts that

12   were sent up by the District as examples

13   to teachers and students to practice

14   with the absolute promise that they

15   would not be on the test were, in fact,

16   on the test, right. So that means that

17   some students lucky enough to receive

18   those prompts were able to write back

19   out what they had practiced in class

20   with teachers' assistance. That means

21   that the scoring that we have is in no

22   way representative of skill or ability

23   and is not in any way fair, equitable or

24   equal, right. And that is completely

25   and unacceptably flawed.

 1   Therefore, I want to argue as

 2   other people have today that those

 3   scores aren't (inaudible), that they

 4   need to be replaced with a different

 5   kind of writing sample. And I want to

 6   refer back to the early comments made by

 7   a parent talking about their child

 8   having expected to be able to write

 9   their story to talk their own

10   challenges, their own needs relative to

11   school in a way that allows the schools

12   to choose its students based on a really

13   nuance understanding of who each student

14   is. That needs to be returned. All

15   that we need to at the very least use a

16   communicative score that includes GPAs

17   and benchmark and STAR evaluations. And

18   students with high grades in writing

19   should be permitted to appeal scores

20   that were below 22 or 17, as the case

21   may be.

22   I think that another point that

23   needs to be made is that GPAs in fact

24   are not beyond the reach of the

25   District. They manage a gradebook which

 1   is the formal grade register for all

 2   students in the District, which has

 3   quarterly and annual grades listed.

 4   Therefore, working out what a GPA is, is

 5   a very simple step beyond that.

 6   And another point that I want

 7   to reiterate is the shame and trauma

 8   that has been imposed on students who

 9   did not score well on that test,

10   particularly students who are expecting

11   to score high based on their GPAs, and

12   the grave consequences that will have on

13   student confidence, health and well-

14   being district-wide, particularly for

15   students who suffer from conditions like

16   anxiety, depression, PTSD and other

17   neuroatypical conditions or

18   disabilities, right.

19   I also want to point out that

20   the failures of this writing piece

21   highlights the lack of equity and

22   equality in the admissions process is

23   generally. And in its current form it's

24   effectively an additional lottery.   I

25   want to point out that lotteries are

1   arbitrary by definition and cannot

2   ensure inclusivity unless they're highly

3   manipulated, that they divide and

4   isolate and that they increase

5   uncertainty and stress. And one of the

6   most common things that I have heard and

7   that many other parents have heard

8   across the District is the great fear

9   that students have that they will not be

10 able to maintain their cohorts and

11 support groups as they move onto high

12 school, that they have no idea if they

13 will be with their friends, with the

14 people who are so important to their

15 maintaining their health and mental

16 health, that they are already concerned

17 about the year, the 18 months they have

18 all just been through, whether we're

19 talking about the issues around Black

20 Lives Matter and the other questions

21 that have sort of been brought to

22 everybody's attention in really

23 important ways, but also because of

24 homeschooling and the ongoing pandemic,

25 the losses that they've all individually

1 suffered, the hardships that have

2 increased in our communities. And most

3 students in the 8th grade see this as

4 the District essentially continuing to

5 be mean and cruel to them at a moment

6 where they most need support and care.

7   So in conclusion, the District

8 has admitted they do not know if this

9 will work. But a dramatic change like

10 this in process should know if it will

11 work. It should be backed by research,

12 data, community and professional

13 consultation and testing that ensures it

14 will achieve its goals before it's

15 implemented, not experimenting and

16 potentially in vain with the high stakes

17 of children's futures. Thank you.

18   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Doctor,

19 thank you so much for your testimony.

20 Much appreciated.

21   Next we have Michael Zhang and

22 then Natalie Morales will wind up the

23 testimony. So, Michael, if you're

24 available, state your name for the

25 record and then proceed with your

 1   testimony. Thank you.

 2   MR. ZHANG: Yes. Good morning,

 3   everybody. My name's Michael Zhang and

 4   I'm here as a spokesperson on behalf of

 5   the Chinese American parents opposing

 6   the new admissions process. I am also a

 7   parent of the School District. I am

 8   also a proud parent of a 10th grader at

 9   Central and a 7th grader at Masterman.

10   My wife and I decided to move

11   our children from Brandywine School

12   District in Delaware with our goal of

13   bringing our children to Masterman and

14   Central because we knew these schools

15   had high expectations and standards, and

16   we have always told our children that if

17   they study hard, they can get into these

18   schools and they become who they want to

19   be. They've participated in many

20   extracurricular activities and community

21   services, and they also study very hard,

22   often sometimes late into the night.

23   And we always told them if they study

24   hard, they will achieve their success.

25   And it is not fair that they will now be

 1   put into a lottery system.

 2   I came to this country as a 3rd

 3   grader and an ESL student, and I got

 4   into a magnet program by 7th grade. I

 5   came in 1987, my whole family came here,

 6   and we started with nothing and built

 7   everything up. And I can personally

 8   relate to the immigrant students and the

 9   impact that this policy has on them as

10   well as first-generation immigrant

11   parents. My family came here for better

12   opportunity and my family, my mother

13   especially, has sacrificed everything

14   for my sister and my future.

15   She always inspired us to work

16   hard and we contributed to society. She

17   is no longer with me today. She had

18   passed away a few years ago. And we are

19   here today because according to the

20   District's budget plan for the Fiscal

21   Year 2021 which was provided funding for

22   about $4 billion in revenues funded by

23   tax dollars paid for taxpayers, it is

24   imperative that the voices of the

25   taxpayers be heard.

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 1                 Many parents in the Chinese
 2   community have reached out to me after
 3   they got to know me from the Christie
 4   Lou Stop Hate and City of Brother Love
 5   Rally.  As Dr. Martin Luther King had a
 6   dream that one day all of our children
 7   can live in a nation that will not be
 8   judged by the color of their skin but by
 9   the content of their character.  We
10   believe that by this, all communities
11   should come together so that we can
12   achieve Dr. King's dream one day.
13                 It is the duty of the School
14   District to improve education for all
15   children and to provide a safe and
16   secure environment that is conducive to
17   learning.  It is the duty of every
18   parent and educator to instill upon the
19   minds of our young children knowledge
20   and wisdom by planting seeds of love and
21   produce the fruit of compassion for our
22   neighbors.  We must choose (inaudible)
23   with their unique gift and talent.  We
24   must liberate their minds so they have
25   the power to become the change that they
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 1   want to see in this world.

 2   As Nelson Mandela also said,

 3   education is the most powerful weapon

 4   that we can use to change a world. We

 5   must inspire our young children. We

 6   must inspire them to become who they

 7   want to be so that one day they may

 8   render (inaudible) in hope for uniting

 9   humanity. And it is also a slogan of

10   the United Negro College Fund that a

11   mind is a terrible thing to waste.

12   And many Asian immigrant

13   parents and children have the question

14   why none of the zip codes in those

15   neighborhoods aren't represented, many

16   of the low-income Asian families like

17   Chinatown and some areas in South Philly

18   and areas in Northeast where there are

19   many low-income working class Asian

20   Americans. They work in restaurant

21   kitchens and as waiters and delivering

22   food and supermarkets and warehouses.

23   Each school has a different

24   magnet program that specializes in

25   different areas of interest. The new

1   process is unfair to all families

2   regardless of race or socioeconomic

3   background. It is unfair to all those

4   who has made tremendous sacrifice for

5   the sake of their children's education.

6   Many immigrant parents who work long

7   hours while their children study on

8   their own. Many themselves have only

9   elementary school-level education and do

10   not even speak English. They did

11   everything they could to be able to help

12   their children qualify by merit into

13   these top-performing schools.

14   Each child is unique and they

15   are very different in their own special

16   ways, but every child should be allowed

17   to pick the school that match best to

18   their interests and their academic

19   abilities. The new process denies our

20   children of that choice. Many Asian

21   American parents did not get involved in

22   their children's school activities

23   because they do not know many issues at

24   our schools because they didn't speak

25   English and they don't understand a lot

1   of the issues that we are dealing with.

2   Many work long hours and they

3   do manual labor jobs. And no

4   information about this new process was

5   ever sent to them in a language that

6   they can understand, and they were never

7   asked to participate in this process.

8   The writing test is not fair to

9   immigrant students who may write

10 perfectly in their native language, but

11 they struggle with -- sorry, but they

12 struggle with English and grammar. And

13 students among the top of their class

14 may not be among their friends next year

15 if they lose the lottery. How is it

16 fair that a poor student regardless of

17 race that perform at the top of their

18 class because they value education and

19 study hard might lose a seat to someone

20 less qualified and may even be from a

21 wealthier family.

22   What kind of message are we

23 sending to our children that their

24 grades and efforts do not matter. The

25 entire process undermines the principle

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 1   of merit and academic integrity that are

 2   of the essence and maintain the high

 3   standard of quality at top performing

 4   schools like Central and Masterman.

 5              Our children are competing

 6   globally with students from all over the

 7   world for spots in our universities.  No

 8   other country will use a lottery system

 9   to qualify their top students into their

10   top schools.  This new policy is unfair

11   to all families regardless of race or

12   economic background, especially to those

13   children who have worked hard to meet

14   the admissions criteria under the merit-

15   based system.

16              My question is why not improve

17   education at all levels by creating more

18   classrooms with students that can

19   qualify into these magnet schools at all

20   levels, even in grade schools through

21   merits rather than lowering

22   qualification standards and there

23   wouldn't be a need for the use of a

24   lottery system.

25              With $4 billion of funding for
```

 1   our School District according to the

 2   School District's 2021 Fiscal Year

 3   budget proposal, we can improve

 4   education by expanding school buildings,

 5   adding more classrooms, hiring more

 6   qualified teachers and support staff.

 7   We can build more schools and make more

 8   magnet seats available so that all who

 9   qualify may earn a seat. Criteria-based

10   schools should select students based on

11   academic achievements and scholastic

12   abilities, along with the student

13   attendance records, behavioral history

14   and essay review by a panel of real

15   teachers and real school staff which are

16   essential.

17   We should focus on improving

18   education, not tearing down schools that

19   took years to build up and rank them on

20   the top of our nation. I suggest we

21   expand our school buildings to have more

22   advanced classes and language programs

23   and hire more qualified teachers to

24   improve education at a much earlier

25   grade at a catchment and neighborhood

 1   level so that students in all zip codes

 2   may quality by merits rather than by

 3   lottery.

 4   I believe the School Board has

 5   abusive power to implement the new

 6   admissions policy without any regards

 7   for public input or accountability.

 8   This is a fake system. It is a fraud

 9   and a scheme perpetrated in the name of

10   equity to destroy our top-rated schools

11   like Masterman and Central, Carver and

12   SLA. The District has failed to improve

13   education at all levels.

14   Let the $4 billion funding

15   received through taxpayer money -- we as

16   taxpayers must demand the School

17   District be fair to all students,

18   respect all parents and be transparent

19   with all process. Until the School

20   District can meet these demands, we ask

21   the process be stopped and consider

22   alternatives so that no student may be

23   harmed in this process. Our children

24   are our future, and I want to thank

25   everyone who has joined to participate

1 today. Thank you.

2   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,

3 Michael, for your testimony. And the

4 last person testifying, Natalie Morales.

5 If you're available, just state your

6 name for the record and proceed with

7 your testimony.

8   MS. MORALES: Okay. Hello. My

9 name is Natalie Morales of Feltonville

10 Arts & Sciences and I'm in the 8th

11 grade. I would like to thank you for

12 you having me here. I believe this

13 policy is highly unfair. It doesn't

14 score how good students write on it.

15 And it puts unnecessary amount of stress

16 on students, and that also causes them

17 to perform worse.

18   Coming from my own experience,

19 this test only made me feel like a

20 failure. It got to the point where I

21 couldn't even look my own mother in the

22 eye because I felt like I failed her.

23 And I'm not testifying only for myself.

24 I'm testifying for other students in the

25 District, probably over hundreds and

 1   thousands. I'm sorry for the

 2   background.

 3   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: That's all

 4   right. Take your time. Not a problem.

 5   MS. MORALES: Well, that's

 6   really all I have. Once again, I would

 7   like to thank you for your time and

 8   consideration.

 9   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you

10   for the courage to come out here and

11   testify. It's important to hear the

12   voice of the students also. We much

13   appreciate it. Thank you.

14   Is there anyone else here to

15   testify on this bill? We do have

16   written testimony that's going to be

17   submitted for the record for Blair

18   Downey, Janira Amedeo, Brett Camarato

19   Miller, Kelly Collings, Dr. Steven

20   Newman and Mitchell Horenstein, so we do

21   have that written testimony.

22   And if there's not any

23   questions, we will now go into a public

24   comment period. We will ask our IT

25   folks to give us a little bit of time I

 1   guess to connect those folks onto this

 2   call. Modesto, are you available to do

 3   that?

 4   COUNCIL TECH SUPPORT: Yes, we

 5   will, Councilman. We need a few minutes

 6   to connect public comment.

 7   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: While he's

 8   doing that, we want to thank everyone

 9   who testified. We have a lot of

10   important information that we shared.

11   We have a lot of concerns that we need

12   to address, and this is a very important

13   hearing and looking forward to

14   continuing conversations as we move

15   forward. Once we have the public

16   commenters on, we will ask IT to read

17   out the names as they are ready.

18   (Brief recess.)

19   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you

20   all. We're back at our public hearing

21   on the Education Committee on Resolution

22   No. 210978. We do have a public comment

23   period now. I believe if we can see who

24   is on the line, I have a list but not

25   sure what order, if everybody is

 1 connected.

 2   For the record, I just want to

 3 announce that Councilmember Thomas is

 4 present at the hearing. Modesto, do we

 5 know who is available?

 6   COUNCIL TECH SUPPORT: We have

 7 Councilwoman Blackwell.

 8   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

 9 Councilmember Blackwell, thank you.

10 Hope you're connected. Just state your

11 name for the record and then proceed

12 with your testimony. Thank you for

13 being here.

14   COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Hi,

15 it's Jannie Blackwell. How are you

16 doing, Councilman?

17   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: We're

18 doing great. Thank you for --

19   COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Can

20 you hear me?

21   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: We hear

22 you well.

23   COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I've

24 been listening to you all morning. I

25 heard the opening comments. And

1 certainly, I want to thank Councilman Oh

2 for his legislation. I should have got

3 on the list early. I've been listening

4 to it since you all made your opening

5 comments and since the State Rep spoke,

6 Head of the Black Caucus. One of my

7 favorite ministers spoke.

8   And I had to call to say how

9 important this is. And when you look at

10 it, everybody, you've had 100 percent of

11 the people testify who agreed that this

12 is not the way to go. And I guess

13 Solomon Jones is one of the most

14 outspoken in his remarks that he's ready

15 for a fight, but everybody feels the

16 same way. And it's very disappointing

17 that outgoing Superintendent and this

18 School Board would not realize that they

19 need to make a change.

20   So certainly, I wanted to thank

21 you. I wanted to say that I look

22 forward to supporting you. There's no

23 way I cannot deal with this whole issue

24 of education that you all are doing a

25 great job in keeping up with.

 1   Councilman Oh, I appreciate

 2   you. You've always stayed on top of

 3   myriad issues. Thank you, Mark, as

 4   well. God bless you. I'm there for you

 5   and thank you for doing the people's

 6   work in trying to make sure that our

 7   children and education are protected.

 8   God bless you.

 9   COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you,

10   Council Lady.

11   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,

12   Councilmember. Thank you for all your

13   hard work and dedication to the City.

14   COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

15   you.

16   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you.

17   Marquita Washington, if you are

18   connected, can you just state your name

19   for the record and proceed with your

20   comments.

21   MS. WASHINGTON: Yes. My name

22   is Marquita J. Washington. Philadelphia

23   City Council Committee on Education,

24   good afternoon. And I thank you for

25   allowing me to be heard. Today I come

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 1   to you as a former teacher, educator in

 2   the School District of Philadelphia and

 3   as a quiet activist for children,

 4   usually preferring to be in the

 5   background.

 6           However, today I am compelled

 7   to speak on behalf of children who are

 8   being affected by the new policy on

 9   criteria-based schools.  These children

10   include my two grandsons.  A whirlwind

11   of thoughts and emotions overcame me

12   when I became aware of this situation.

13   For the sake of time, I will only

14   mention a few.  Some of these points

15   might be repetitive, but they are my

16   thoughts.

17           My first thought as an educator

18   was to look at the assessment tool with

19   which these students are being judged,

20   MI Write.  In 2019 in a published

21   position paper, MI Write by their own

22   admission wrote that this is a tool that

23   should be used for scoring and giving

24   students comprehensive lessons on

25   writing essays and get prompt feedback
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1   on their strengths and weaknesses.

2   After providing several reasons

3   why MI Write should not be relied upon

4   as an assessment tool, the paper

5   concludes by stating and I quote, "While

6   PEG is amazing, it is important to

7   remember that it is a machine, not a

8   brain and can only do what it's trained

9   to do. It would be very unfair to

10 assign a grade to a student based on its

11 evaluation of an essay. One student

12 might benefit from transferring PEG

13 scores to grades while another might be

14 penalized. MI Write were designed to

15 help students practice their skills and

16 to improve them based on feedback. This

17 is a great tool, but it's not the only

18 tool for teaching writing nor for

19 assessing."

20   A system of assessments should

21 provide opportunities for students that

22 demonstrate what they know and what

23 they're able to do in a variety of ways.

24 It should assure that multiple forms of

25 evidence about student progress and

 1   achievement are available and that they

 2   are used collaboratively to make

 3   judgments about students. With such

 4   high stakes attached ensuring our

 5   children's learning progress, where is

 6   the data to show if MI Write is a valid

 7   and reliable tool for assessment. Does

 8   MI Write measure their full true

 9   potential as an active learner or just

10   their ability to write.

11   I suggest that it provides a

12   fragmented picture of the learner's

13   ability as a writer that completely

14   takes the teacher and teaching out of

15   the equation. It deeply concerns me

16   that for nearly two years these students

17   have been faced with many uncertainties

18   of life that make a person who has been

19   on this planet for 70-plus years shutter

20   in disbelief.

21   Research forecasting the impact

22   of school closings and virtual learning

23   on progress and achievement has yet to

24   be determined. We are only scratching

25   the surface of the short-term and long-

 1 term academic impacts of COVID. I

 2 contend the two years of fragmented

 3 learning would affect the student's

 4 writing and writing process more

 5 adversely than other content areas.

 6   And I'll pause for a moment.

 7 Because as a teacher, I realize what it

 8 was like to get a writing piece from my

 9 students. It was definitely a process

10 and not something that they could sit

11 down in front of a computer and generate

12 with 100 percent proficiency. Finally,

13 my soon to be 13-year-old, a curious,

14 responsible and amazing person, during

15 these most unprecedented times said to

16 me, Mommom, they don't understand the

17 position that they're putting us in.

18 I'm angry. For three years they have

19 told us to work hard, get the best

20 grades that we can so that we can get to

21 where we want to go. He told me it's

22 all been for nothing.

23   One of his classmates said,

24 that this is an experiment and we are

25 the lab rats. He is a student at

 1 Masterman Laboratory and Demonstration

 2 School. I venture to say that many

 3 students throughout the City are feeling

 4 this way. I applaud you today on your

 5 efforts to address equity in the School

 6 District.

 7   In conclusion, in the words of

 8 the MI Write paper I referred to

 9 earlier, substituting MI Write for a

10 teacher-assessed essay does not make a

11 dependable summative grade. In the name

12 of equity and in consideration of the

13 unprecedented time, do not throw the

14 baby out with the bath water. Take a

15 pause, re-evaluate, listen to the

16 solutions being proposed today and

17 please do not allow our 8th graders to

18 suffer the brunt of hasty decisions

19 yielding terrible results. Thank you

20 very much.

21   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you.

22 Thank you for your testimony, Marquita.

23   Next we have Shonda Corbett.

24 If you're available, Shonda, just state

25 your name for the record and proceed

 1 with your testimony.

 2   MS. CORBETT: Yes. Hi. My

 3 name is Shonda Corbett. My son is an

 4 8th grader at Hill-Freedman World

 5 Academy. When we joined Hill-Freedman

 6 in the 6th grade, the principal told us

 7 that Hill-Freedman middle schoolers got

 8 preference for admission to high school.

 9 The policy is always spelled out in the

10 student handbook, which describes the

11 middle school year program as 6th

12 through 10th grade. We have 150 high

13 school seats and only 60 8th graders.

14 There is enough space for Hill-Freedman

15 middle schoolers and for children from

16 the lottery who we welcome to join us.

17   After speaking to other

18 parents, I discovered that they did not

19 know anything about the lottery. After

20 further investigation, I found out that

21 the majority of the parents voted

22 against the proposal. But the Board

23 still pushed it through anyway. I feel

24 like we're being bullied to do something

25 or to go along with the Board with

 1   something that I would not have voted

 2   for had I known about the proposal

 3   myself.

 4   The School Board has a

 5   nonbullying policy for our students.

 6   And at this point as a parent, I feel

 7   like I'm being bullied. It would be so

 8   easy to honor the commitment that your

 9   principals and employees made to our

10   children. Why should we believe

11   anything tells us at this point when

12   they keep going back on their word.

13   Under the new system, why would

14   any parent choose these middle schools

15   knowing that they face another lottery

16   in a few years. Why are we disrupting

17   the children at Hill-Freedman, a

18   majority Black school that has twice

19   been named a Blue Ribbon school because

20   there is a lack of diversity in other

21   schools. The need to improve equity is

22   huge, but I don't think the District

23   thought out the details of the new

24   policy carefully.

25   The middle school issue is only

1 one of many problems. How does the new

2 admission policy help neighborhood

3 schools which are so lacking in

4 resources that many parents won't even

5 consider them. Why did they and are

6 they taking such a big part of our

7 children's future allowing it to rest on

8 this writing, MI Writer. Did you know

9 that the company -- I'm sure you do

10 because she just spoke about it -- says

11 that it shouldn't be used for grades. I

12 would like to know some of these answers

13 to some of these questions as soon as

14 possible. Thank you.

15   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you

16 again for your testimony, Shonda.

17   Beth McRovian. If you're

18 available, state your name for the

19 record and then proceed if you're

20 connected with your testimony.

21   COUNCIL TECH SUPPORT: She will

22 not be testifying today, Council Chair.

23   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Beth is

24 not available?

25   COUNCIL TECH SUPPORT: Correct.

 1   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Mitchell

 2   Horenstein. Mitchell, if you're on --

 3   MR. HORENSTEIN: Hi. Good

 4   morning -- good afternoon rather. My

 5   name is Mitchell Horenstein. I'm an

 6   educator, a Professor of Russian and

 7   East European Studies at University of

 8   Pennsylvania. I've lived in the City

 9   since 2007. I've served on University

10   admissions committees, and I have a

11   child who loves, I mean loves, attending

12   a public magnet school here in

13   Philadelphia.

14   I want to thank Councilmember

15   Oh for organizing these hearings,

16   Councilmembers Squilla, Thomas and

17   Blackwell and all Councilmembers and

18   community members for their

19   participation. Professor Josh Wilson of

20   the University Delaware, an author of 17

21   articles on automated writing assessment

22   stated that the use of MI Write for high

23   stakes decisions like admissions was

24   problematic, and boy, was he right.

25   The way the writing assessment

 1   was rolled out was not only unfair, but

 2   also subject to many irregularities that

 3   have yet to be fully aired. Some were

 4   mentioned before. But MI Write is on

 5   one of the damaging aspects of the new

 6   selection process. The lottery

 7   undermines the principle of merit. To

 8   me, honestly that's the biggest problem.

 9   The existing zip code

10   preference does little to address

11   widespread problems of equity in our

12   City, and the system does not account

13   for schools that admit not in 9th grade,

14   but in middle school. I suppurt a

15   school selection system based on merit,

16   measures of socioeconomic disadvantage

17   that can be calculated for the entire

18   city rather than just a few zip codes,

19   and some carve-outs for high schools

20   that have their own attached middle

21   schools.

22   But first, let's talk about the

23   process that got us here. The

24   deficiencies of the school selection

25   process along with the environmental

 1   health and safety issues, Council will

 2   consider later today, both arise from

 3   the poor policy process of the School

 4   District of Philadelphia. The District

 5   tries to do things secretly. It does

 6   not sufficiently consult experts. It

 7   makes rushed decisions. It gets

 8   criticized harshly as it has today. It

 9   circles wagons, tries to avoid and

10   repeats. We need to work with the

11   District to break this cycle, and we

12   need solutions.

13   So how do we solve the problem

14   of diversity with excellence. The data

15   exists to design a better approach

16   today. Excellence demand that the best

17   students with the best grades and test

18   scores are rewarded. Equity demands if

19   students from disadvantaged backgrounds

20   are not punished for circumstances

21   beyond their control.

22   To combine these goals together

23   requires a simple composite measure for

24   each student, a school weighted GPA,

25   test scores in reading and math and

 1   perhaps a revised writing sample. Plus,

 2   it requires a more nuance measure of

 3   disadvantage or advantage calculated not

 4   by zip code, which are very large,

 5   diverse, but by the much smaller and

 6   more precise area in which they live and

 7   on which the School District already has

 8   a lot of data.

 9   Simply weight, the education

10   excellence measure by a measure of

11   disadvantage and reward the best

12   students, while boosting all students

13   fighting significant disadvantage up the

14   ranking, no lottery. Use those rankings

15   for admissions and to compose the wait

16   list at each school. Allow students to

17   rank order their school preference. For

18   those high schools with attached middle

19   schools with an entry point in 6th or

20   7th, allocating spaces to those middle

21   schools is appropriate. The

22   circumstances vary and must be tailored

23   to each school.

24   By contrast, the approach the

25   District has chosen to achieve equity is

 1   perverse and unfair. When the District

 2   finally announced the preferred zip

 3   codes several weeks after the selection

 4   process was announced on October 6th,

 5   only 6 zip codes out of approximately 50

 6   in the City were designated for

 7   preference in the lottery. But I ask

 8   you, does anyone believe that those zip

 9   codes are the only places where

10   socioeconomic or racial injustice is in

11   the City.

12   These zip codes do not include

13   any in West Philadelphia or Southwest

14   Philadelphia or Chinatown. In fact, the

15   majority of disadvantaged people in the

16   City are most likely left out of this

17   system. Many Philadelphia parents,

18   including my wife and I, depend on

19   magnet schools because local catchment

20   schools have a very poor record of

21   preparing students for college.

22   If you are a parent who needs

23   your child to be prepared for college,

24   you need your magnet school. This need

25   is most pronounced for disadvantaged

 1   groups that have no other choice.

 2   Magnet schools provide a vital pathway

 3   of opportunity in the City. Let's not

 4   lose sight of that. Magnet schools

 5   selection matters deeply to a majority

 6   of parents, but different races and

 7   socioeconomic status throughout the

 8   City. That is why we see such an outcry

 9   on this issue today.

10   Philadelphia also I should

11   underline has an enormous opportunity

12   here. If we can achieve diversity with

13   excellence in our public magnet schools

14   in a way that has been lauded by so many

15   other major cities, Philadelphia could

16   become a leading example for the entire

17   country. The stakes are high. I want

18   the City of Philadelphia to be known for

19   the diversity and excellence of the

20   schools. I do not believe in this great

21   City that that goal is out of reach.

22   And I thank all of you for your

23   participation.

24   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,

25   Mitchell. Thank you for your testimony.

 1   Next we will have Michael

 2   Young. Michael, if you're connected,

 3   please state your name for the record

 4   and proceed with your --

 5   MR. YOUNG: Hi. I'm here.

 6   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: We hear

 7   you.

 8   MR. YOUNG: Hi. My name is

 9   Michael Young and I'm the parent of a

10   5th grader at Masterman. And I oppose

11   this admission system for all the

12   reasons which you've already heard. I

13   just want to touch on two. One of which

14   I think has not had enough play. The

15   first one is that we're throwing our 8th

16   graders under the bus. We are breaking

17   promises to them, and I want to make

18   sure that point is made strongly enough.

19   The second point is that we're

20   lowering the criteria for entry into

21   some of the highest ranking schools.

22   We're lowering the criteria. It used to

23   be in Masterman, for example, that all

24   A's in 8th, great performance throughout

25   5th through 8th grade would get you into

 1 the high school. You had 50 percent

 2 chance at worst, and probably 100

 3 percent chance of you were in the top

 4 half of the school.

 5   Today for these 8th graders,

 6 they're facing less than a 10 percent

 7 chance of continuing from 8th grade to

 8 9th grade. The Carver students were

 9 made a promise and that promise is being

10 broken as well. I don't want to belabor

11 all of this because I have very little

12 time.

13   What I would like to do is

14 propose a solution, and the solution

15 isn't that difficult. It's not perfect.

16 It doesn't solve all the problems. But

17 we're in a pickle here, that the

18 District has put us in a position where

19 any major change to what they're already

20 doing will be difficult, will take time

21 and lots of thinking. It will turn the

22 plan upside down, and they've already

23 turned a bunch of students upside down

24 in order to get this far. So I'm going

25 to propose a plan or two which we can

 1   implement quickly and solve most of the

 2   problems.

 3   We should move immediately to a

 4   50/50 plan, where 50 percent of the

 5   admissions will be chosen by lottery in

 6   accordance with all the criteria that

 7   has been set out by individual schools

 8   for entry into those schools. The

 9   second 50 percent will go back to being

10   chosen by the principals. So they will

11   pick their own 8th graders based on

12   merit and taking into account the essay,

13   but not using the essay as a hard stop

14   on admissions and applying other factors

15   such as you've heard a few ideas about

16   weighing continuous scores, et cetera.

17   The principal will choose the

18   second 50 percent. The zip code kids

19   will go first. I don't think this was a

20   great policy. I don't think it's a

21   great idea, but it's in place and I

22   don't know if it's too late to change it

23   without having an outcry for those

24   communities. So the zip code kids will

25   go first, but we should put a cap on how

 1 many given to any particular school, cap

 2 at 20 percent. So in other words, the

 3 zip code kids go first. If they

 4 qualify, they get into the school of

 5 their choice with a cap of 20 percent.

 6   The lottery chooses the next 50

 7 percent of the students into the school.

 8 And then the principals do what

 9 principals can do within a committee

10 that they choose, a couple of teachers,

11 the principal, a couple of experts they

12 will choose. The other 50 percent of

13 their students who will enter their 9th

14 grade.

15   What we can't do is go back and

16 ask these 8th graders to do anything

17 more than they've already done. They

18 survived the pandemic. They've worked

19 their butts off for the last four years

20 to keep all A's, to get good grades, to

21 go on to school. They've been forced to

22 take this essay, which is wrong, wrong-

23 minded and harsh. We shouldn't impose

24 any new testing or any criteria on these

25 8th graders. We should be able to make

 1   this decision with the information we

 2   have at hand.

 3   As a second plan, if you wish

 4   to add seats you can do that as well.

 5   What we could do is there's roughly I

 6   believe 20 million square feet of vacant

 7   office space in Center City,

 8   Philadelphia. And I think that's a

 9   number from before the pandemic. We

10   have no idea how soon all of the people

11   who will be coming back or if they'll

12   come back to fill those buildings. A

13   school like Masterman is already

14   overcrowded. But you can take a

15   Masterman, you can add 60-plus seats to

16   the 9th grade, do so for the next four

17   years and move Masterman to a Center

18   City location and a high-rise.

19   You can move a couple of other

20   schools into Center City as well and

21   increase their 9th grade for the next

22   four years as well, and then go back and

23   renovate those old schools for the

24   schools return or for use by another

25   school or use as a new school. And then

 1   you go to the same plan that I just laid

 2   out, the 50/50 plan. Zip code kids go

 3   first, capped at 20 percent. And then

 4   the lottery of 50 percent of what's

 5   left, and then the principals make a

 6   selection. I have faith in the

 7   principals. I think they can make an

 8   unbiased selection.

 9   So please consider this plan.

10   It helps mitigate any harm from the new

11   lottery policy. It's measured. It's

12   thoughtful. It's fair. It can be

13   implemented with a minimum of adjustment

14   to the announced plan, and it requires

15   nothing more than from the stressed-out

16   group of 8th graders, and it fulfills

17   the promises made to them. It tamps

18   down the controversy with the parents

19   and students, and then it allows us to

20   spend our time trying to reimagine the

21   school system, and Philadelphia needs

22   reimagining.

23   The Philadelphia scores for

24   math proficiency and for reading

25   proficiency are in the mid 20s and low

1   30s, and that's not good for the City.

2   The City needs better schools. We

3   should start from scratch. And I have a

4   ask for City Council. The ask is that

5   you form a commission of experts and

6   bring them in and study the subject of

7   how can we turn the Philadelphia school

8   system into a model education system for

9   urban environments. We can be the model

10   for the world, and have this commission

11   working with the District, working with

12   the Board, pulling in experts when they

13   need to, rethink, reimagine the

14   Philadelphia's school system. It's not

15   that crazy an idea.

16   We can use lots of tools that

17   are available today to get it done and

18   we can be the number one school system

19   in the state of Pennsylvania, top of the

20   crowd in this country and better able to

21   compete against the rest of the world.

22   Thank you.

23   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you

24   for your testimony, Michael.

25   Next we have Maggie Li Zhang.

1   COUNCILMAN OH: Chairman, can I

2   interrupt for a second as you call

3   Maggie Li Zhang. Just to state that we

4   are running against the clock. There's

5   a 2 o'clock meeting, and I would just

6   request that the witnesses just keep in

7   mind that we have about eight more

8   witnesses. It's typically about three

9   minutes, so we can get everybody in.

10   Thank you very much, Chairman.

11   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,

12   Councilmember.

13   Maggie, if you're on, can you

14   state your name for the record and then

15   proceed?

16   COUNCIL TECH SUPPORT: Maggie

17   is not present, Councilman.

18   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay.

19   That's one less. That's good.

20   Ivan Zhou. Ivan. Are you

21   present?

22   COUNCILMAN TECH SUPPORT: Not

23   present, Councilman.

24   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay.

25   That's good.

 1   Stephanie King.

 2   MS. KING: Hello.

 3   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Hey,

 4   Stephanie. Just state your name for the

 5   record. We hear you and then proceed

 6   with your testimony. Thank you.

 7   MS. KING: Sure. My name is

 8   Stephanie King. I'm the parent of two

 9   children at General Philip Kearney

10   School and the member of Parents United

11   for Public Education. I want to thank

12   Councilmembers for being here today and

13   being interested in this issue.

14   But I am here today to talk

15   about in favor of the change in

16   admissions policy. I have been among

17   the education activists petitioning the

18   District to make magnet school

19   admissions more equitable for years, and

20   I am very disheartened by the reaction

21   to this new policy, including the way it

22   has been misrepresented by so many

23   people today, including Councilmember

24   Oh.

25   This new policy has been

1   portrayed as giving spots to undeserving

2   students or meaning their hard work is

3   no longer important or lowering

4   standards. So let me say it again, the

5   lottery for these schools is for all

6   qualified students. Qualified means

7   that they have met the high standards

8   for admission. These students have

9   still had to make excellent grades, show

10 excellent attendance and keep a clean

11 disciplinary record. Students who are

12 not qualified will not be eligible for

13 the lottery.

14   Weighting for zip codes

15 acknowledges that some students have

16 struggled in underprivileged schools

17 this City and this Council gave them and

18 still came out qualified, but these

19 people who are able to buy their house

20 in a neighborhood or use school

21 selection to transfer into a gentrifying

22 school believe that their children's

23 hard work counts.

24   To be blunt, much of the

25 objection to this policy is privileged

 1 and racist. The only exception is

 2 objection to the timed writing test,

 3 which people on all sides agree must be

 4 abolished. Though I noticed that not

 5 many of these voices objecting to high

 6 stakes testing were there when it was

 7 the PSSA instead. Some of these

 8 objections are from privileged parents

 9 who are simply except that they rigged

10 their game towards the wrong test.

11   Statistics do not lie.

12 Philadelphia's magnet schools are not

13 representative of Philadelphia's

14 demographics or zip codes and have

15 become overwhelmingly a concentration of

16 privilege. This policy levels the

17 playing field while still requiring

18 excellence. The people protesting it

19 are of self-interest, should be ashamed

20 of themselves. And while we're at it,

21 it's telling that this process seems to

22 have blindsided people on Council when

23 it was in the works for over a year. It

24 was a whole bunch of focus groups and a

25 survey in the spring of 2021 that I

1   participated in.

2   I'm sorry, but if this change

3   took you legislators completely by

4   surprise, you were not paying attention.

5   I am doing this for free in your paid

6   six figure. But now, there are all

7   these new voices suddenly claiming to

8   care about what's fair in these schools.

9   Now, that it's no longer a cakewalk

10 directly into magnet schools for your

11 most privileged constituents. Your

12 wringing your hands over a couple of

13 extra points for an underprivileged zip

14 code, when you had no problem when the

15 zip codes getting preference were the

16 zip codes of Meredith or Greenfield or

17 Sadie Alexander because that was what

18 was happening.

19   If these Councilmembers

20 complaining and parents protesting just

21 don't want to send your kids with poor

22 people even when they're qualified, then

23 just say that instead of this fake

24 concern, and take the word fair out of

25 your mouth. Thank you.

 1   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you

 2   for your testimony.

 3   Next we will have Marc Stein.

 4   Are you connected?

 5   MR. STEIN: Hello.

 6   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA Hello,

 7   Marc. State your name for the record

 8   and then proceed with your testimony.

 9   MR. STEIN: Hi. My name is

10   Mark Stein. I am the parent of an 8th

11   grader in the School District. As it

12   happens, I also taught English

13   literature in writing at the University

14   and high school level in this City and

15   overseas for a long time. You, however,

16   don't have to have had my experience to

17   know and understand that the computer

18   rating of a writing assignment as was

19   used in the District is so fundamentally

20   and fatally flawed has to be

21   irredeemably hopeless.

22   However, what I really want to

23   talk about today very briefly is to tell

24   you about what was happening on the

25   ground in the schools leading up to,

 1 during and after the writing exam and

 2 add some color and detail that you may

 3 not have heard about yet.

 4   Dr. Furjan testified that the

 5 writing exam was not given

 6 simultaneously and, therefore, the

 7 prompts and there were only 18 of them

 8 circulated like wildfires, as you can

 9 imagine. You can't blame the students

10 for that happening. The students then

11 could practice writing essays to the

12 prompts that they would actually

13 receive. Some students moreover were

14 able to locate automated grading

15 software that mimicked the software that

16 was actually used, put their essays into

17 that software and get an assessment, a

18 grade. They could then tinker with

19 their essays and understand what the

20 software was looking for.

21   Moreover, cheat sheets on how

22 to gain the system. One of them written

23 by an adult with familiarity with the

24 software was also circulated, giving

25 tips like what kind of vocabulary words

1   to use, what kind of punctuation to use

2   bump up your score. Again, I don't

3   think you can blame the students, the

4   teachers, the parents for driving

5   through the enormous holes that were

6   left open in the process and taking

7   advantage of them.

8   I happen to know, and this is

9   firsthand knowledge, that something very

10   different was going on in certain

11   charter schools. Some schools didn't

12   know anything whatsoever about this exam

13   until November 14th. Calls to the

14   District were not returned. Some

15   students had to register for the exam,

16   verify an account and then had to be

17   removed to another location to take the

18   writing exam.

19   Now, briefly what happened

20   during the actual exam, it hasn't been

21   noted yet that some students found that

22   automated punctuation spell check

23   software was enabled on their computers

24   during the exam. That was not the case

25   for other students. Moreover, as you

1   also know the Internet connections were

2   lost, at least one school. And now,

3   after the exam was over, as we have

4   heard today, the students immediately

5   receive their scores. You can imagine

6   what that was like. Some students found

7   they had achieved scores above their

8   desired cut-off. They were

9   understandably jubilant, joyous, happy.

10   Others were -- sorry, sorry about that.

11   Other students finding out that their

12   score was below the cut-off were

13   publicly shamed and humiliated

14   simultaneously in front of their peers.

15   I don't think it is too much of

16   an overstatement to say that it was a

17   traumatic event for those children, a

18   completely needless and useless problem.

19   To me, the way this exam was carried out

20   was so fundamentally flawed in theory

21   and in execution that it cannot and must

22   not be used in the admissions process.

23   If this kind of process were

24   allowed in any other context, I think it

25   can be fairly labeled as fraudulent. So

 1   I would ask that if this body, that

 2   Council, has the authority to revoke the

 3   exam, it should exercise it. Thank you.

 4   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you

 5   for your testimony, Marc. Much

 6   appreciated.

 7   Next is Jupiag Zhou. Is Jupiag

 8   connected?

 9   MS. ZHOU: Yes.

10   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay.

11   Just state your name and proceed with

12   your testimony.

13   MS. ZHOU: Okay. My first name

14   is Jupiag, J-u-p-i-a-g. Last name is

15   Zhou, Z-h-o-u. Yeah, Jupiag Zhou. See,

16   I don't have a children right now, but

17   my daughter went to Central High school

18   in 2000, so I really appreciate

19   Philadelphia. You know, they did have a

20   study group and if you do the group,

21   it's good to take it for you.

22   I think about the need for just

23   go to lottery, some people going to be

24   saying who handles the lottery. The

25   lottery is going to be fair or not fair.

 1 For example, if I handle the lottery,

 2 maybe I can play the lottery. Maybe my

 3 friends or my family or somebody can go

 4 to the school, not because of the school

 5 study, they can go to a gooder school.

 6   So I have four properties here.

 7 I think I pay the school tax. I think

 8 Philadelphia good. I think Philadelphia

 9 is good because of what we have good

10 schools here and the rest of you pay, so

11 people are going to be -- more people

12 want to stay in Philadelphia. People

13 want to get more jobs, so you're going

14 to get more taxes from everybody here,

15 right.

16   But if the school goes to the

17 lottery, I think the school's maybe

18 quality may be going down, and maybe

19 everybody will want to move out. So

20 really, it's not a good idea. I don't

21 think that the lottery is fair. Like

22 people have the professional person, you

23 know, the tax. When you take a tax,

24 when (inaudible) or any tax rating, the

25 tax doesn't know you're White or Black

 1   or race. They use the fair just like

 2   the law.

 3   You meet here and then you go

 4   there. If you don't meet here, you

 5   don't go there. And the schoolteacher,

 6   they really want to go to the quality,

 7   right. They want every year more

 8   students go to the university, so

 9   schoolteacher want to be good. So why

10   we just let the school do better job.

11   Because if the school -- I have my

12   family, they send the children like an

13   international student. They pay the

14   money for the best school, even the

15   public school too.

16   So if your school is good, you

17   also can get (inaudible). If you draw

18   out the school for quality, you make

19   everything mess up. I really don't

20   think the lottery is good. That's why I

21   really want them to some point. I'm

22   sorry about that. Maybe I say

23   something -- I don't like it. Okay.

24   I'm finished.

25   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you.

 1   Thank you for your testimony.

 2   Next we have Blair Ryan. Then,

 3   Blair, if you're there, state your name

 4   for the record and continue. And then

 5   Ling Lin is followed.

 6   MR. RYAN: Yes. My name is

 7   Blair Ryan and I'm a proud father of

 8   three wonderful children, and all of

 9   whom attended schools in Philadelphia,

10   the Philadelphia area. Now, my youngest

11   son Trey just graduated from Carver

12   Engineering and Science with the class

13   of 2020.

14   When my son and I discovered in

15   2015, the admissions process was very

16   clear, simple and straightforward. Yes,

17   can you hear me?

18   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes, we

19   can hear you fine. Please proceed.

20   MR. RYAN: Okay. Great. So

21   when my son and I first discovered

22   Carver in 2015, the admissions was very

23   clear, simple, straightforward and

24   equitable. So the prerequisites were

25   exemplary academic performance,

 1 behavior, attendance and recommendation

 2 letters from teachers.

 3   Now, we live in the Ogontz

 4 section of Philadelphia with Carver

 5 being at 16th and Norris Street. At the

 6 time the school was comprised of 77

 7 percent Black students with the

 8 remaining 23 percent dispersed among

 9 White, Asian and Hispanic students.

10 Now, the student population was drawn

11 from across every zip code in the City.

12 As the principal at the time, Principal

13 (inaudible) many times over the years

14 that my son attended the school.

15   Now, think about this for a

16 second. What could be more "equitable"

17 than the standard adhered to where any

18 child no matter from what zip code he or

19 she hailed could be accepted into any

20 special admission schools across the

21 City based solely on merit, academic

22 achievement, behavior and teacher

23 recommendation.

24   An essay was required as an

25 intrical part of the application, but

 1   not separate and apart, not timed and

 2   certainly not graded solely by a

 3   computer. In addition to the student

 4   population representing every zip code

 5   the school was cited by the President of

 6   the School Board as an outstanding

 7   example of diversity among all the

 8   schools.

 9   Later in my son's time at

10   Carver, as President of the Carver Home

11   and School Association, we worked

12   diligently with the HSA Board and

13   general membership to support efforts

14   along with the principal of maintaining

15   Carver's status as an equitable and

16   academic gem. Such efforts is

17   supporting the SAT workshops at Carver

18   and college tours for Carver students

19   among others.

20   All of these efforts culminated

21   receiving the Blue Ribbon award in 2019.

22   Now, given all of the above statements,

23   if fair access, inclusiveness and

24   academic achievement is the pretended

25   goal of the School Board, in Carver's

 1   case what needed to be changed. And

 2   what needed to be changed and similarly

 3   constituted and directed special

 4   admission schools. Do the proposed

 5   changes aid, abet, promote and maintain

 6   Carver's current stellar track record in

 7   the above-mentioned area? How do the

 8   actions of the School Board,

 9   nontransparency in the process of

10   formulating the new proposals, the

11   sudden disruptive ill-tied

12   implementation of the proposals,

13   proposals that threaten the smooth or

14   certain transition of the 8th graders

15   into the 9th grade.

16   The principal stated to the

17   fact that the middle school was formed

18   to groom and acclimate the accepted

19   students from matriculation into the

20   high school. Given a candid and factual

21   presentation of the current status of

22   the position of Carver, may the School

23   Board respond. Hopefully, candidly and

24   factually to the above questions.

25   Trey and I were lucky. We are

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 1   spared the plight of being told abruptly

 2   and unsuspectingly in the midst of the

 3   admissions process that the process was

 4   changed effective immediately, causing

 5   the severest anxiety disruption and

 6   dislocation as forced upon the parents

 7   and students of this current Carver 8th

 8   grade.  Thank you.

 9             COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:  Thank you

10   for your testimony.

11             Next we have Ling Lin.  Ling,

12   if you're available.

13             MS. LIN:  Yes.

14             COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:  Just state

15   your name and then proceed with your

16   testimony.

17             MS. LIN:  Hello.  Can you hear

18   me?

19             COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:  Yes, we

20   hear you good.

21             MS. LIN:  Okay.  I speak

22   Chinese Mandarin, so my daughter will be

23   helping translate for me.

24             COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:  Ling.

25             MS. LIN:  Yes.
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1   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: State your

2   name and then proceed.

3   MS. LIN: Okay. My name is

4   Ling Lin and today I will be speaking

5   Chinese Mandarin, and then my daughter

6   will be helping me translate for me.

7   Good afternoon, Councilmembers. Hi, my

8   name is Ling Lin. My oldest daughter

9   Dana (inaudible) will be speaking on

10   behalf of me. I am a first generation

11   Chinese immigrant and the mother of

12   three children. I have two daughters

13   who are high school students, the

14   youngest son at elementary school.

15   As a first-generation Chinese

16   immigrant, I can't speak the English

17   language. My oldest daughter applied to

18   Central High three years ago and did not

19   get accepted. During that time she told

20   me that her classroom grades were not as

21   outstanding to apply for Central.

22   At that moment, I told her you

23   have to try harder. If you get

24   accepted, I'm afraid you will not be

25   able to handle the workload and will

 1   suffer from stress and pressure. My

 2   second daughter was standing next to me

 3   and she will be applying to high school

 4   within two years. After overhearing the

 5   conversation, she put in twice the

 6   effort compared to her sister.

 7   This year she finally got

 8   admitted into Central High where she had

 9   been working hard the past eight years.

10   My son is 10 years old. On December

11   9th, I took him and his two sisters to

12   join the protest. He visualized and

13   learned why so many community parents

14   and students came out to protest.

15   When we returned home, he

16   asked, Mom, we live in the underpoverty

17   area, the zip code 19133, so does that

18   define that I have the advantage to get

19   accepted into the top school in the City

20   while having good grades? I said, Son,

21   you have no advantage. My son was sad

22   and frustrated. And then he told me, it

23   is obviously useless for me to study

24   hard and it is useless to live in a poor

25   area. I have low luck and can't draw

 1   the lottery. Meaning, that I can't get

 2   into my top choice of school.

 3   Using his anger so he asked,

 4   why should I study hard, I don't want to

 5   study anymore. So why am I born into

 6   Asian household, why do you have to live

 7   in this poor area and work every day. I

 8   thought living in a poor area means that

 9   we have some kind of advantage. Is it

10   because I am Asian American so I don't

11   have the advantage.

12   So as an Asian mother, I would

13   like to ask everyone what kind of

14   responses should I give to my child. I

15   would like to ask the School District,

16   isn't school a place for children to

17   achieve their dreams and (inaudible).

18   Shouldn't school pay attention to

19   nurturing children's morality, wisdom

20   and values. Now, that you're teaching

21   children to obtain things while making

22   efforts to hate their own skin, to hate

23   their own ethnicity and to hate other

24   ethnic groups, are you intensifying

25   tension between ethnic groups. Isn't

 1   the School District accountable for

 2   these actions?

 3   Speaking of the perspective of

 4   many Asian Americans, we hoped and think

 5   the potential of the United States

 6   striving for a better life. Our

 7   American dream is what our children and

 8   grandchildren achieve their own American

 9   dream and build in the United States.

10   But our School District is now

11   destroying children's dreams and all the

12   parents' efforts into achieving our

13   children's dreams.

14   Martin Luther King, Jr. once

15   said, I have a dream that my four

16   children will one day live in a nation

17   where they will not be judged by the

18   color of their skin, but by the content

19   of their character. Please let every

20   student pursue their dream fairly and

21   freely. Dreams should not be realized

22   by efforts, nor by luck, nor by

23   privilege. Thank you.

24   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you

25   so much for your testimony. Appreciate

1   it.

2   Last, Felicia Evans.

3   MS. EVANS: Hello. My name is

4   Lakeisha Evans.

5   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Lakeisha,

6   sorry.

7   MS. EVANS: No, no worries.

8   Thank you for the opportunity to address

9   the Committee this afternoon now. I'm

10   not going to belabor my response. I

11   think so many people echoed a lot of the

12   sentiments I have and the way that I

13   feel. I'm speaking from the perspective

14   of I run afterschool programs in the

15   heart of North Philadelphia so I see the

16   need in this area, but I also am the

17   mother of an 8th grade student who's

18   enrolled in Hill-Freedman Academy. And

19   raising a young boy of color in the City

20   of Philadelphia, so the stakes are very

21   high and different for me as a mother as

22   well as an employee here working in the

23   heart of North Philadelphia.

24   I'm all for a more equitable

25   process, but I think everyone needs to

1   be very clear that equity does not mean

2   equal for all. And while this new

3   process may seem to be equitable for

4   some children, it in turn truly is not

5   equal or fair at all. There is a

6   significant number of details that have

7   not been shared with parents at all

8   about how exactly this process was

9   determined and also how it will be

10   rolled out.

11   So how do we really know truly

12   if it is equitable. There's over 80 zip

13   codes in the City of Philadelphia. How

14   are only 6 determined. Was income a

15   factor? Why not explore more income-

16   based lottery system. I think it really

17   doesn't answer a lot of parents'

18   questions or concerns about if they live

19   in zip codes that weren't selected and

20   know there aren't any students in their

21   current zip codes that are attending

22   these illustrious schools, how is that

23   equitable for these students and their

24   communities. I'm still not really clear

25   on how these zip codes were selected, as

 1   I know many other parents aren't.

 2   How many slots -- it also

 3   wasn't shared how many slots at schools

 4   have been reserved for this lottery.

 5   That also is not clear for people, which

 6   I think has led to this increased

 7   concern for parents like myself whose

 8   son is enrolled in Hill-Freedman World

 9   Academy, which is a special admit

10   school, who are feeling like, well, are

11   our students going to be pushed out to

12   accommodate to this new lottery system.

13   That wasn't made clear either. And how

14   was it determined how many students will

15   be enrolled at special admit schools

16   that would potentially be pushed out by

17   this process? I think none of those

18   questions were either asked and/or

19   answered or provided to parents, which I

20   think makes this process during this

21   particular time as we're coming up on

22   almost two years of dealing with an

23   unprecedented global pandemic, just

24   really adds to a lot more fear and

25   concern that we all have.

 1   Faculties, schools, staff,

 2   parents and students have been stretched

 3   way beyond capacity over this time and

 4   are just trying to figure out how best

 5   to serve their families' needs, their

 6   students' needs and to make the right

 7   decision. So school administrators

 8   themselves not even having a clear

 9   understanding of this process while

10   they're supposed to be providing

11   guidance to parents and students also

12   has been very anxiety-ridden for me as a

13   parent of a student enrolled in the

14   school where I have school counselors or

15   even principals who are unsure of how

16   this process is going to roll out when

17   acceptances start to roll in.

18   My son, again, a student of

19   color who's going to be faced with so

20   much in his young life as well as in his

21   adult life mainly because of who he is

22   and so many others who look like him,

23   but who also works really, really hard.

24   He's an honor roll student in the midst

25   of a pandemic who's working really,

 1 really hard. I too feel a lot of the

 2 parents' sentiments. What am I supposed

 3 to tell my son while I'm also trying to

 4 keep him safe in a city where it's

 5 increased violence.

 6   Students enrolled in the

 7 Philadelphia public school system as

 8 early as kindergarten are not being set

 9 up for success. The system is flawed

10 and have failed many of them, rendering

11 them hopeless and helpless which indeed

12 has to be one of the largest

13 contributors to the increased and deaths

14 in the City.

15   This is the reason why parents

16 are going to feel the way they're going

17 to feel about this process, are going to

18 have these concerns, are going to have

19 these fears. Because as a parent, you

20 just want to protect, provide and

21 nurture your children and you cannot do

22 any of this during this process, which

23 is just extremely difficult. Any other

24 educated person -- I'm struggling even

25 more because one would think you come

 1   with some of that expertise and I can't

 2   answer my son's questions, and it's just

 3   hard for me as a parent.

 4   I just wanted to take the time

 5   today to share that sentiment as a

 6   mother as well as someone who works in a

 7   community of need and understands the

 8   need for the support of the students

 9   that I support every single day that

10   look like my son, and just wanted to

11   make sure that I'm making sure that my

12   son's voice is being amplified during

13   this process. So thank you for the

14   opportunity to address the Council

15   today.

16   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you.

17   Thank you for your testimony. Is there

18   anybody else to testify?

19   (No response.)

20   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Hearing

21   none, any questions from the Committee?

22   MS. ZHANG: Hello.

23   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes.

24   MS. ZHANG: Can you hear me?

25   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes.

1   MS. ZHANG: Oh, hi. Thank you

2   so much. My name is Maggie Li Zhang.

3   Thank you for --

4   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Hi,

5   Maggie. I called you earlier. I

6   apologize. Proceed with your testimony.

7   MS. ZHANG: Okay. Thank you.

8   My name is Maggie Li Zhang. I am a

9   first-generation immigrant parent of my

10   9th grader and a 4th grader of the

11   School District of Philadelphia. I'm

12   also a licensed professional counselor

13   and my specialty is helping Asian

14   American families with middle school

15   students and high school students.

16   I'm hoping that all who are

17   involved in this year's school selection

18   process can realize what kind of impact

19   it has had on our 8th grade students and

20   their families so far. So the process

21   can be paused in order to cause no more

22   harm. I'm here to share with you what

23   some 8th grade students and their

24   parents shared with me.

25   The students can't be here

 1   today since they are in school, although

 2   it was a delight to hear from Natalie.

 3   A lot of parents they have very limited

 4   English skills. Again, I was so happy

 5   to hear Ms. Ling Lin's testimony with

 6   her daughter's help. I believe their

 7   voices are just as important and I want

 8   to share more parents and the students

 9   voices.

10   The students felt concern and

11   confused before the MI Write test as

12   even the teachers couldn't give them

13   clear information until maybe the middle

14   of November. And then they experienced

15   anxiety and panic when they were told

16   during the test that their work couldn't

17   be saved when there was only 20 minutes

18   left. They felt the School District

19   lacks empathy to have the students take

20   the test and get the score right away on

21   a full school day when some students

22   suffer from anxiety and despair of not

23   receiving the minimum score that they

24   need to get into their desired school.

25   Because of the new selection process,

 1 especially the MI Write at the lottery

 2 system, the student felt the School

 3 District and I quote, "seem to manage to

 4 lack students' morale and hope which

 5 causes the students to destruct the

 6 School District and even actively hate

 7 it."

 8   And I would like to read a

 9 letter from testimony from a Chinese

10 parent in Chinese because she couldn't

11 write in English, and then I will

12 translate it into English: We

13 immigrated to the U.S. barely speaking

14 any English so did our daughter. She

15 had to work really hard all by herself.

16 As parents, the best we could do is to

17 work day and night so we could afford to

18 hire a tutor to help her pass her ESL

19 test, and she worked extremely hard in

20 order to get into a good high school and

21 then college. And now it seems that we

22 all did change this.

23   All these students and the

24 families are negatively affected by this

25 new selection process. It is the right

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 1   thing to do to pause it right now and to

 2   reconsider it based on the suggestions

 3   and the requests given by the experts,

 4   the parents and the wider community.

 5   And that is truly called doing right by

 6   our students.  Thank you.

 7               COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:  Thank you

 8   for your testimony.

 9               Is there anyone else to

10   testify?

11               (No response.)

12               COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:  Hearing

13   none, any comments or questions from the

14   Committee?

15               COUNCILMAN OH:  If I could,

16   Chairman, I'll make a comment.

17               COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:  Sure.  Go

18   ahead.  Thank you.

19               COUNCILMAN OH:  This is a

20   hearing based on a result in response to

21   an outpouring of concern, confusion,

22   anger and most of all, frustration that

23   people were not being heard, parents,

24   students, including experts in the

25   field.  And I think that is very
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 1 concerning.

 2   I understand passion and I

 3 understand research and believing you're

 4 right. As a Councilman, there's things

 5 that I do and sometimes I have to walk

 6 it back. Sometimes the people speak and

 7 I have to walk it back. And I feel that

 8 is the right thing to do when the

 9 evidence, when the information is

10 presented that perhaps I did not

11 consider everything or I did not hear

12 from every expert that was available,

13 those type of things.

14   I do think it is important for

15 the School District to listen. And I

16 want people to understand the School

17 District is an independent body of

18 government. We do not have the power

19 over it to tell the School District what

20 to do. I do think there's something

21 lacking in that. However, there is

22 something that can be done and I think

23 it has to be done quickly.

24   I don't know the outcome. But

25 based on what I've heard today, I will

1   make an effort to either present a

2   letter or a resolution calling for the

3   halt of this process. There are good

4   goals of course, but the process should

5   not be worse than the one that already

6   exists. And sometimes the one that you

7   know is the one that you can work

8   within, and a new process creates

9   confusion and problems. But there has

10   been plenty of just data and

11   information, very objective, that

12   clearly states that there's something

13   wrong with this process as it is.

14   However, it does lead to

15   problems even if it is paused, but that

16   is a problem created by what I think is

17   the School District rushing in to do

18   this, taking the opportunity during

19   COVID when there's a lot of confusion to

20   introduce a massive change like this

21   while people are distracted, discouraged

22   and other things. Perhaps I'm wrong in

23   that assessment, but I find that to be a

24   very reasonable assessment as to why

25   something like this would be announced

1   and already implemented with such little

2   input and consideration. People, if you

3   like this process, speak up. If you

4   don't like this process, speak up

5   because action will have to be taken

6   rather quickly.

7   That's what I have to say,

8   Chairman. I appreciate the time. And

9   let me thank Chairwoman Maria Quinones-

10 Sanchez. Timing was very important.

11 We're about to go to our last session

12 tomorrow. And so, this hearing was

13 granted. She included it, and I

14 appreciate all the Councilmembers who

15 sponsored, who voted and passed

16 unanimously and all the Councilmembers

17 who are on the call and listening and

18 participated.

19   Thank you, Chairman.

20   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,

21 Councilmember Oh, and thank you for your

22 resolution. It's important

23 conversation. And what we'll do is

24 we'll leave it to the call of the

25 sponsor if we need to have another

 1 hearing in the Education Committee to

 2 work with Chairwoman Sanchez on that.

 3   If there are no other comments

 4 and no one else here to testify, that

 5 will call an end to our hearing and

 6 thanks everyone who gave their time and

 7 efforts. There being no further

 8 questions from members of the Committee

 9 and no other witnesses to testify, this

10 concludes the business before the

11 Committee on Education today. Thank you

12 all for your attendance. Thank you for

13 your testimony, your passion and desire.

14 Looking forward to working with the

15 School District to come up with a system

16 that could work for all. Have a great

17 day, everyone. Thank you.

18   COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you.

19   COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Have a

20 happy and healthy New Year.

21   (Committee on Education and

22 Youth concluded at 1:40 p.m.)

23

24

25

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1   C E R T I F I C A T I O N

2

                    I, hereby certify that the

3

proceedings and evidence noted are contained

4

fully and accurately in the stenographic notes

5

taken by me in the foregoing matter, and that

6

this is a correct transcript of the same.

7

8

9

10

11
                    _____
                    TANEHA CARROLL
12   Court Reporter - Notary Public

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16

17

18   (The foregoing certification of

19   this transcript does not apply to any

20   reproduction of the same by any means,

21   unless under the direct control and/or

22   supervision of the certifying reporter.)

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